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HOW SPEECH ACT THEORY CAN HELP ADDRESS PROBLEMS IN THEOLOGY AND
CHURCH POSED BY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Doctrinal Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
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April 7, 2022
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This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Tawnya.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my wife Tawnya for her unwavering faithfulness and patience in putting up with me in my writing of this dissertation.

I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous support and friendship provided to me by Dr. Paul Frank throughout the doctoral program at Concordia Seminary and the process of writing this dissertation.

I would also like to thank my parents, John and Valerie Westby, whose constant support and encouragement was vital to my being able to complete this dissertation.

I would also like to thank Dr. Joel Okamoto, my doctoral advisor at Concordia Seminary, for his constant and unwavering guidance in accomplishing this dissertation. This dissertation would not have come to completion without his guidance, input, and instruction through the dissertation process.

Finally, I would like to thank the elders and members of Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado, for encouraging me in completing this dissertation and providing time for me to do so.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>cogito</i>	This stands for René Descartes' assertion: "I think; therefore, I am."
<i>GRA</i>	This stands for <i>God, Revelation and Authority</i> , the general title of Carl Henry's six volume <i>magnum opus</i> .
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
RTP	The "representative theory of perception."

GLOSSARY

The term “locution” or “locutionary act” refers to the fact of an utterance of a sentence in any given language.

The term “illocution” or “illocutionary act” is an aspect of the speech act that denotes what the speech act is trying to accomplish pursuant to its “illocutionary force.”

The term “illocutionary force” with respect to a speech act denotes what the illocutionary act is trying to do, such as, promising, commanding, asserting, describing, asking a question, etc.

The term “illocutionary point” denotes the point or purpose of the speech act.

The term “illocutionary effect” denotes how the illocutionary force of the speech act changes the state of the affairs in the world in a manner stated in the propositional content of the speech act.

The term “perlocutionary effect” denotes the effect of the illocutionary force of the speech act on the hearer or reader.

Uptake is when the effect that the illocutionary act is aimed at occurs in the hearer or reader of the speech act.

ABSTRACT

Westby, Charles W. "How Speech Act Theory Can Help Address Problems in Theology and Church Posed by Modern Philosophy." Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2022. 347 pp.

This dissertation analyzes modern idealism as developed by René Descartes and Immanuel Kant to show how modern philosophy has impacted conservative theology, focusing on the theology of Carl F. H. Henry. The relationship between theology and philosophy is analyzed in terms of foundationalism, using postliberal theological analysis propounded by Hans Frei and George Lindbeck. Speech Act Theory as propounded by J. L. Austin and John R. Searle is used to critique modern idealism in supporting a taxonomy of the Gospel derived from the NT. Speech Act Theory is also used to marginalize reductive scientific explanations in theology; to provide a critique of the representative theory of sense perception in favor of direct realism; to aid theology in overcoming the fact-value split; and to address the issues of historicity, the nature of divine revelation, and the nature of theological language.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A Statement of the Problem

This project arose from two motivations. The first motivation was to understand in some detail how modern philosophy has impacted Christian theology since the dawn of the modern age in the seventeenth century. That modern philosophy has had a profound impact on Christian theology is axiomatic. This project involves trying to understand *how* that impact works based on the specific contentions of modern thought. An effective way to understand how this impact works is to go back to the roots of modern philosophy, back to the thought of René Descartes (d. 1650). His thought established the issues, assumptions, and contours of modern thought that are still active today.

The second motivation came from studying Speech Act Theory as an aspect of the philosophy of language. Speech Act Theory can help theologians critique the specific contours and assumptions of modern philosophy. It can also provide support in accounting for how the apostles in the New Testament testify to God's actions in Jesus Christ and for how those actions give rise to the Gospel. For purposes of this project, examining how Speech Act Theory can be helpful to theology will involve digging into the pioneering thought of J. L. Austin in the middle of the twentieth century and the development of his thought into Speech Act Theory by John R. Searle.¹ Searle's work in Speech Act Theory is particularly helpful because of how he applied its insights to specific problems and issues posed by modern philosophy.

Accordingly, this project has two central theses. The first thesis is that modern philosophy

¹ J. L. Austin (d. 1960) was a professor of philosophy at Oxford in the middle of the twentieth century. John Searle, a student of Austin, taught philosophy at the University of California at Berkeley for many years until recently. Searle's latest book was published in 2015.

has had a profound impact on Christian theology, not only for liberal theology, but also for conservative, American evangelical theology. The second thesis is that Speech Act Theory as propounded by Austin and developed and applied by Searle can be helpful to Christian theology over against modern philosophy in specific ways. It is argued here that Speech Act Theory can be helpful to theology by, on the one hand, providing a powerful critique of particular features of modern philosophy, and, on the other hand, by providing support for “a taxonomy of the Gospel” in specific ways.

A hallmark of modern philosophy that endures to the present that has had a profound impact in theology is the “fact-value split.” The fact-value split is a feature of modern philosophy that divides the world into a realm of “facts” and a realm of “values” and posits that these realms have no logical connection to each other. Facts in the fact-value split have to do with the physical world and how it works, including physical things, events, and occurrences. What the physical world consists of and how it works is assumed to be the exclusive domain of the natural sciences. Values in the fact-value split have to do with many things that are vitally important to human life and society, as well as to theology and the church. Values include ethical prescriptions and moral judgments. They include affective phenomena, such as faith. They can include metaphysical assertions and beliefs about God. They include relational considerations, such as reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins. They also include institutional realities that do not occur in nature, like money and the phenomenon of economics in human society and institutions relating to the ministry of the Gospel and the church in Christianity.

Three significant assumptions operate with the fact-value split. The first is that facts are the exclusive domain of mathematics and the natural sciences. The second is that facts are

“objective” and “values” are subjective and “emotive.”² Accordingly, facts can be known by universal reason operating in the natural sciences, while values are a matter of feeling and personal opinion. Facts are public. Values are private. Religion, including Christianity, consists of feeling, emotion, and personal opinion and experience. An unexpected outcome of the fact-value split, however, is that facts in themselves have no meaning. Meaning must be provided by the interpreter of the facts, which can end up making the significance of even “facts” subjective. The third assumption is that there can be no necessary or logical connection between facts and values such that no fact of itself, including any physical occurrence or event, could give rise to any determinate values. In philosophy, this issue is characterized as whether one can logically derive an “ought,” that is, a value, from an “is,” that is, a fact or physical occurrence or event. In Christian theology the issue of deriving an “ought” from an “is” involves how physical events like the death of Jesus Christ on a Roman cross and His resurrection from the dead could give rise to particular and universal claims about Jesus, the necessity of faith in Jesus, theological assertions about Jesus as God and Lord, and reconciliation with God expressed in the forgiveness of sins and justification.

One way to quickly tell whether modern philosophy is operating determinatively in Christian theology is to look for the influence of the fact-value split. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (d. 1781) reflected the fact-value split in theology early in the modern period when he asserted that “contingent facts of history can never be proofs of necessary truths of reason.”³ Anthony

² A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952), 108, famously argued that “in every case in which one would commonly be said to be making an ethical judgment, the function of the relevant ethical word is purely ‘emotive.’ It is used to express feeling about certain objects, but not to make any assertion about them.” He went on to state that express moral judgments “are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood.” Though Ayer’s arguments reflect logical positivism, which has since been discredited in philosophy, his arguments about moral judgments still accurately describe the fact-value split.

³ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, “On the Proof of Spirit and of Power,” in *Lessing’s Theological Writings*, trans. Henry Chadwick (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1956), 53.

Kenny explains that

Lessing endeavored to show in a number of critical studies of the New Testament [that] the evidence of the divine origin of Christianity is unconvincing. Even the strongest historical evidence about contingent facts, Lessing went on to argue, cannot justify any conclusion of necessary truths about matters of divinity. The Christian religion, therefore, can be no more than a stage in the education of the human race, and its dogmas can have no more than symbolic value.⁴

The fact-value split is operating in Lessing's contentions because he argued that no action of God in Jesus in physical reality could tell us anything that is universally true about God; no action of God in physical reality in Jesus could have any significance to theology, to the doctrine of God, or to the relational realities found in a taxonomy of the Gospel.

David Tracy, a contemporary revisionist theologian, also expresses the fact-value split when he says that

[b]efore one can understand that action and that story [about Jesus Christ as portrayed in the Gospels] ... one must first ask whether any matters of fact—as distinct from metaphysical realities—can be described as appropriate disclosures of more than a particular cultural situation ... On logical grounds alone, a matter-of-fact claim cannot be validated metaphysically in the manner of the theistic claim itself.⁵

In these contentions, Tracy, like Lessing, asserts that the events relating to Jesus are limited to that time and place and relative. As a result, he expresses the assumption that no fact relating to Jesus of Nazareth could give rise to knowledge of God that could be true for God or give rise to the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' Name as good news for all human beings. A "theistic claim" that could in any sense be true and apply to everyone must be established in a way that does not involve occurrence in physical reality. It must arise out of speculative reason accessible to anyone, and it must consist of a principle that anyone could theoretically recognize using reason.

⁴ Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy: The Rise of Modern Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3:99.

⁵ David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1975), 205.

The problem the fact-value split poses for Christian theology can be illustrated in what modern theologians have said about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Rudolf Bultmann (d. 1976) asserted, for example, that “we cannot understand a miraculous natural event such as the resuscitation of a dead man ... as an act of God that is ... of concern to us.”⁶ Bultmann’s statement reflects the fact-value split because he first assumes that the fact of the resurrection is subject to the judgements of the natural sciences, which judgments exclude the possibility of the occurrence of the resurrection as an actual fact. Bultmann also reflects the fact-value split when he contends that Jesus’ resurrection as an act of God in physical reality is of no concern to Christians and Christian theologians, which boils down to asserting that an action of God in physical reality, even if it be assumed to have actually taken place, could have no bearing on theological claims. He assumes that theology cannot arise from physical events. But Bultmann’s contentions were nothing new in modern theology. Hans Frei relates how Friedrich Schleiermacher (d. 1834) had asserted long before Bultmann “that the Christian faith has no stake in the resurrection.”⁷ Schleiermacher asserted that “it is impossible to see in what relation both [the visible resurrection and ascension] can stand to the redeeming efficacy of Christ.”⁸ Like Bultmann and Schleiermacher, David Tracy affirms the fact-value split. It is not surprising, therefore, that he finds the “Christ event” to be symbolic and a fiction.⁹

⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology: The Problem of Demythologizing the New Testament Proclamation,” in *New Testament & Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed., and trans. Schubert M. Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 7. According to Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, ed., and trans. Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 116–20, Bultmann assumed the modern philosophies of Kantianism, existentialism, and deism without bringing these philosophies under critical scrutiny with respect to the modern presuppositions underlying them. Bultmann used those modern philosophies to criticize the Christian faith and redefine it. These philosophies undergird and reflect the fact-value split.

⁷ Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 75.

⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, eds. H. R. MacIntosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 418.

⁹ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 204.

It is evident that the assertions of Schleiermacher, Bultmann, and Tracy regarding Jesus' resurrection are out of step with the Apostle Paul, both in terms of affirming the actual, physical resurrection of Jesus and how the resurrection gives rise to the Gospel and theological claims. The Apostle Paul asserted, for example, that "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17).¹⁰ He also asserted that "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9). Both of these statements must assume that Jesus actually, physically came back to life again, or they would be empty statements. In 1 Cor. 15:17, Paul argues that faith in Christ would be futile and there would be no forgiveness of sins with God if Jesus did not really rise from the dead. Moreover, it would be meaningless for Paul to connect salvation to believing and confessing that God raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 10:9) if in fact God had not done so. Thus, Paul holds that Jesus did really live again in His body. He expressly states as much in 1 Cor. 15:1–8, 20.

These passages show that the Apostle Paul connects Jesus' resurrection from the dead to the forgiveness of sins, faith, and salvation, items that fall in the category of "value." He also asserts that Jesus "was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). The Apostle here asserts that the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ gives rise to Christian theology because the event declares Jesus to be the Son of God. Thus, the Apostle not only regards the resurrection of Jesus from the dead as having actually occurred in physical reality, he also asserts that Jesus' resurrection gives rise to the forgiveness of sins, faith, salvation, and theology, a connection that the fact-value split assert is impossible. The Apostle thereby makes a logical connection between the physical event of

¹⁰ Biblical citations from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

Jesus' resurrection and such items of value, contrary to the assumptions of the fact-value split.

It may not be surprising to conservative theologians and Christians that Schleiermacher, Bultmann, and Tracy did not affirm Jesus' resurrection and its relation to the Gospel and theology, since they would be regarded as liberal in theology. Accordingly, it is often assumed that the fact-value split has only impacted liberal theology in a determinative way and not conservative theology, since conservative theology formally repudiates allowing philosophy to be used foundationally or determinatively in theology.

Thus, it may be surprising that Carl F. H. Henry (d. 2003),¹¹ a conservative American evangelical theologian, asserted that “a bizarre and even brute event has no meaning and supplies no confident basis for cognitive claims.”¹² He made this comment in reference to the resurrection of Jesus. Henry held orthodox Christian beliefs, including believing that Jesus actually, physically rose from the dead. Henry also regarded Scripture as verbally inspired and as making true statements with respect to the events it portrays. Yet, his characterization of the resurrection as “bizarre” and “brute” and without meaning to “cognitive claims” gives one pause. It reflects the fact-value split and is, therefore, out of step with the Apostle Paul's understanding of the resurrection. Henry's statement reflects the fact-value split because it speaks of the resurrection as a meaningless event. He also asserts that it has no significance to cognition. Henry's assertion is strikingly similar to Lessing saying that the physical events involving Jesus of Nazareth have no relation to matters of divinity and necessary truths of reason. Furthermore, Henry's statement reflects the fact-value split because it asserts that the resurrection as a physical event can provide no information that is useful to theology, whatever he means by “cognitive claims.” In other

¹¹ Carl Henry was influential in American evangelicalism in the last part of the twentieth century.

¹² Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority (GRA)*, Vol. 3, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part Two*, (1979; repr., Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 158.

words, his statement reflects the view that there can be no way to derive values from a physical event. The resurrection as an event is meaningless. The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, certainly did not regard the resurrection as a meaningless event. He also regarded the resurrection as vitally important to saving faith, the forgiveness of sins, and theology, though he does not relate the resurrection to “cognitive claims” but to faith and confession. Henry relates the resurrection to “cognitive claims” apparently because the resurrection must be verifiable pursuant to the tenets of universal reason, as we will see. The connection of Jesus’ resurrection to the forgiveness of sins and faith is conspicuously absent in Henry’s characterization.

As a result, Henry’s characterization of the resurrection suggests that he assumed the fact-value split in his theology. This may be surprising since it has been assumed that the fact-value split has operated determinatively in “liberal” theology. This points out that modern philosophical assumptions can be operating in an unexamined way in conservative theology with detrimental results, with the result that such assumptions need to be identified, brought to the surface, and examined, for the benefit of conservative theology and church life.

It is worth examining for theology, therefore, how the fact-value split arose from the assumptions of modern philosophy in the first place. More than that, it is worth examining how the fact-value split and the assumptions of modern philosophy in general can be operating in conservative theology so that conservative theology can turn away from modern philosophy functioning foundationally for conservative theology. This dissertation pursues such an examination for the sake of Christian theology by examining the roots of modern thought and its impact on theology, particularly conservative theology. It then examines how Speech Act Theory can be applied to critique the assumptions of modern philosophy, including the fact-value split, and support contentions that are present in the NT proclamation of the Gospel.

Modern Philosophy's Impact on Christian Theology in Focus

Modern philosophy's impact on Christian theology could be examined in many different ways. In addition to the fact-value split, modern philosophy's impact can be examined in relation to three specific issues. These are: (1) assuming or requiring a continuity between Christianity and culture which shows itself in theology as the problem of foundationalism or "public theology;" (2) subjectivism; and (3) secularism.

Foundationalism is a concept that relates to the relationship of theology to modern philosophy. Hans Frei explains that "foundationalism" means that modern philosophy provides "the *criteria* of meaning and certainty, coherence as well as truth, in any arena of human reflection,"¹³ and that philosophy arbitrates for every other discipline, including theology "what may at any time and anywhere count as meaningful language, genuine thought, and real knowledge."¹⁴ Richard Rorty (d. 2007) likewise explains how modern philosophy operates foundationally when he describes it

as the attempt to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art, or religion ... on the basis of its special understanding of the nature of knowledge and of mind. Philosophy can be foundational in respect to the rest of culture because culture is the assemblage of claims to knowledge, and philosophy adjudicates such claims.¹⁵

Rorty goes on to explain that, in modernity, "philosophy became, for the intellectuals, a substitute for religion. It was the area of culture where one touched bottom, where one found the vocabulary and the convictions which permitted one to explain and justify one's activity *as* an intellectual, and thus to discover the significance of one's life."¹⁶ Accordingly, modern

¹³ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 19–20, emphasis added.

¹⁴ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 19–20.

¹⁵ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 3.

¹⁶ Rorty, *Mirror of Nature*, 4, emphasis original.

philosophy is operating foundationally in theology when it is determining the questions that must be answered and the criterion of what can count as genuine thought and genuine knowledge. This includes determining the basis for adjudicating the legitimacy of claimed, physical events. This basis became mathematical reasoning and the natural, physical sciences. Facts must be governed by mathematics and the natural sciences. Tracy expresses foundationalism in theology when he states that “[t]he genuine values of modernity—openness, autonomy, change, critical investigation of all our traditions, personal responsibility for one’s judgments and beliefs, constant struggle for authentic liberation—are precisely those characteristics of the modern experiment which cannot be set aside.”¹⁷

The concept of “public theology” follows from foundationalism. Here I am following William Placher when he describes “public theology” as requiring that theological claims be grounded “in evidence and warrants acceptable to any intelligent, rational, responsible person.”¹⁸ This follows from foundationalism because modern philosophy insists that true knowledge can only arise from universal reason. As a result, public theology requires that theology be undertaken pursuant to the dictates of modern philosophy and science. The question for analysis and investigation becomes how foundationalism and public theology arose from the roots of modern philosophy and can find expression, even if well-intentioned, in conservative theology.

“Subjectivism” refers to a way of obtaining knowledge where it is assumed or held that knowledge of anything must arise from within the human knowing subject. In Christianity subjectivism is operating when it is held that knowledge of anything in relation to God and the Christian faith must arise from within the theologian or believer, not from any divine activity

¹⁷ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 175.

¹⁸ William C. Placher, “Revisionist and Postliberal Theologies and the Public Character of Theology,” *The Thomist* 49 (1985): 395.

external to the human mind and heart that is in any way physical. Subjectivism in theology arises from the fact-value split because it is deemed that theology and faith have to do with values which must be a matter of personal opinion and feeling. Thus, it becomes important to examine how the roots of modern philosophy lead to subjectivism in theology.

Tracy described subjectivism in theology when he related how Schleiermacher asserted that “the theses of faith must now become the ‘hypotheses of the theologian.’”¹⁹ Subjectivism is at play in churches when Christians assert that something must be true and that action must be taken on the basis of feeling—often sentimental feeling—or their own opinion contrary to the teaching of Scripture and the accepted doctrinal positions and practices of the church. The unspoken assumption is that the Scriptures and accepted doctrine and practice must be interpreted and understood pursuant to feeling and subjective opinion.

As an additional problem, subjectivism cuts the individual off from authority and tradition and teaches the individual to be a law unto himself or herself, that is, autonomous. Most problematically, it directs Christians away from assurance of God’s grace in God’s operations in Christ and the Holy Spirit in the external word of the Gospel and the sacraments. As such, it directs Christians to find the assurance of salvation in themselves in some way, which is the way of existentialism, works righteousness, or just the values of the dominant culture and society. In the Gospel, however, the autonomy of the self must be given up in order to be saved by Another by grace operating in Jesus Christ. Grace operating in Jesus Christ, however, operates in and through God’s specific actions in physical reality.

Alasdair MacIntyre explains the effects of subjectivism in modern Western ethics, which can be taken as analogous to subjectivism in theology. MacIntyre refers to subjectivism as

¹⁹ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 27.

“emotivism” and discusses how it impacts the fields of morality, moral discourse, and public policy and politics.²⁰ MacIntyre describes emotivism as “the doctrine that all ... moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, ... attitude or feeling.”²¹ In emotivism, “anyone and everyone can ... be a moral agent, since it is in the self and not in social roles or practices that moral agency has to be located.”²² MacIntyre asserts that modern philosophy gives way to individual autonomous self-assertion under the power of its own presuppositions.²³

Subjectivism poses problems for theology because it leads the Christian and theologian away from God’s actions in external reality, speech, the Scriptures, accepted church tradition under the Scriptures, and the sacraments. It does so by precluding the human subject from being shaped directly by such external operations. In theology, subjectivism inspires the theologian to assert “what really happened” based on some frame of reference that is external to and critical of the original observer of God’s actions and the biblical writer. Under the influence of emotivism, God’s actions in physical reality, the preaching and teaching of God’s word, and the accepted doctrine and practice of the church fail to be recognized as determinative for understanding Christianity, faith, appropriate conduct, and the basis and assurance of reconciliation with God and with each other. The question for analysis and investigation becomes, therefore, how subjectivism arose from the roots of modern philosophy and can find expression often unwittingly in conservative theology.

Secularism involves a worldview in which God cannot be believed as having any causal relation to events and operations in the physical world. Facts are subject to the analysis of the

²⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 6–10.

²¹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 11–12, emphasis original.

²² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 32.

²³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 33–34.

natural sciences. Secularism as a view of reality arose out of deism. Bertrand Russell explains that in deism “dynamical laws suffice to determine the motions of matter, and there is no room for any influence of mind.” The result is that everything physical is governed by mathematics and the mechanical laws of natural science.²⁴ In deism, God could not act directly in human beings or physical affairs to generate the Scriptures or faith and could not use physical action as a way to teach theology and accomplish or communicate the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation. Anything to be known and believed about God must arise from within the human being, that is, subjectively. Secularism and subjectivism go together. The principles of modern philosophy that give rise to deism and secularism also give rise to the fact-value split.

Bultmann expressed secularism in theology when he asserted that “those of us who understand ourselves in purely biological terms do not understand how a supernatural something or other like the πνεῦμα [i.e., the Holy Spirit] could intervene in the closed context of natural forces and be effective in us.”²⁵ The phrase “closed context of natural forces” captures the viewpoint of secularism. Bultmann goes on to assert that “we each understand our self to be a closed inner unity that is not open to the interference of supernatural powers.”²⁶ If a theologian assumes such a view of things, then he or she could not believe that God intervenes in the world’s operations or a person’s life. Hence, there could be no physical resurrection of Jesus. Hence, the Holy Spirit could not work faith in a person in and through the Gospel or sacraments. In stark contrast, the Apostle Paul asserts that “[t]he Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom.

²⁴ Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945), 561.

²⁵ Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 6.

²⁶ Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 6.

8:16–17).

In modern thought, secularism has become an assumption about what exists and how the world works that is held *a priori*, that is, prior to an encounter with the Scriptures and any experience of external reality or external divine activity, such as, sense experience of physical events, preaching and teaching God’s word, and sacramental action and ritual. An *a priori* is an assertion held prior to experience. It could also be viewed as a “lens” or “filter” by which one approaches the world and any particular set of facts or information by which one sifts and judges the facts and information with respect to what could be held to be true. In secularism, the natural sciences as driven by mathematics are assumed to be the sole and exclusive arbiter of what exists and how the world works. If some event in physical reality is asserted to have happened, it must be criticized on the terms of the natural sciences or accounted for only if it can have a naturalistic explanation. On such a view, theology must conform to philosophy and science, and “religion,” spirituality, values, and faith are driven inward. Religion can have nothing to do with the physical and so is a purely inward, private, and subjective thing, a flight away from speech and the physical. So-called miracles *do not and cannot* happen. Claims to the contrary must be reinterpreted as fictional story telling. The question for analysis and investigation becomes how secularism arose from the roots of modern philosophy and can find expression, even unwittingly, in conservative theology.

A Postliberal Mapping of Theology

As Christian theology has developed in the modern age, a traditional way of mapping theology or providing a description of the general types of theology has also developed. The traditional mapping or typology has divided theology neatly into “liberal” and “conservative” theology. The terms “liberal” and “conservative” have tried to capture the relationship of the

theologian to the modern outlook as determined by modern philosophy. The liberal theologian has assumed that the modern outlook is valid, and that Christian theology must be revised, even in its essential claims, in a manner that is consistent with the modern outlook. On the other hand, the conservative theologian has rejected the proposition that Christian theology must be revised in a manner that comports with modern philosophy. The conservative theologian theoretically contends that theology should not be determined by philosophy, while the liberal theologian has historically interpreted and re-cast Christian theology in terms of philosophical schemes derived independently of the Scriptures and brought to bear on them.

Thus, it is thought that the liberal theologian uncritically accepts the fact-value split such that anything physical in the Christian faith must be judged and revised according to the tenets of the natural sciences. The rejection of the physical resurrection of Jesus and revising it into some symbolic (Tracy) or existential (Bultmann) meaning serve as prime examples. This accords with the liberal theologian accepting the historical critical treatment of the Scriptures with the result that Christian faith becomes an inner phenomenon of feeling and transcendental thought, which is to say subjective. Theological language, accordingly, becomes an expression of inner feeling.

Conversely, it is thought that the conservative theologian rejects the fact-value split and, therefore, rejects its secularism and affirms the “miracles” portrayed in the Bible, including but not limited to, the resurrection of Jesus. The conservative wants to embrace the fact side of the fact-value split while rejecting the hegemony of the natural sciences with respect to the facts. Accordingly, the conservative theologian has historically rejected the validity of subjecting the Scriptures to historical criticism. In addition, the conservative theologian purports to value objectivity rather than subjectivity. Theological language must consist of objective, propositional truth statements.

In addition, the traditional mapping of modern theology between “liberal” and “conservative” has been based on formal affirmations regarding the inspiration and authority of Scripture as the written word of God. The “conservative” theologian formally affirms that the Scriptures are the inspired written word of God and the authoritative source of Christian theology. This often brings with it the view that Scripture is adequately accounted for as consisting of objective propositional truth statements. The “liberal” theologian has historically denied such claims about Scripture.

The traditional mapping will prove inadequate, however, if conservative theology does not reflect phenomena that are present in a taxonomy of the Gospel as drawn from the NT and if it can be shown that conservative theology has been influenced determinatively by philosophy in the formation of theological assertions and understanding. One way to gauge whether modern philosophy operates determinatively in conservative theology is to look for whether conservative theology reflects phenomena found in the NT in terms of methodology and claims that are made. If conservative theology does not reflect such phenomena, then Scripture does not appear to be operating authoritatively for such theology, in spite of the formal claims. Moreover, if philosophy operates determinatively in conservative theology, then the distinction between liberal and conservative theology in relation to philosophy breaks down. This paper will show how conservative theology can reflect these problems, which is to say that the traditional mapping of theology in the modern age between “liberal” and “conservative” can obscure the impact of modern philosophy on conservative theology. If the traditional mapping does obscure modern philosophy’s impact on conservative theology, then it ceases to be helpful in trying to understand how modern philosophy impacts theology. As a result, an alternative mapping of theology in the modern age is needed.

What has become known as a “postliberal” approach to theology can provide such an alternative. The postliberal approach can be helpful because it looks beyond formal affirmations to examine how the relationship between theology and philosophy actually functions in a particular theologian. It also provides an analytical framework for understanding how theology and philosophy should relate to each other in the interests of having Christianity speak on its own terms, while providing analytical conceptuality for examining how philosophy can be operating foundationally for a theologian. The traditional mapping and typology do not provide such an analysis. Two helpful examples of postliberal analysis in theology that will be discussed here are George Lindbeck (d. 2018) and Hans Frei (d. 1988). The approach of this paper has affinity with their approach in certain ways.

George Lindbeck

George Lindbeck’s analysis moves beyond the traditional mapping by identifying how conservative theology can reflect subjectivism and the problem of public theology. He first explains the traditional mapping by identifying a “cognitive-propositional” model of religion, on the one hand, and an “experiential-expressive” model, on the other. He relates the cognitive-propositional type to conservative theology and the experiential-expressive type to liberal theology. Both types pertain to an understanding of theological language. For cognitive-propositionalists, theological language consists of propositions that are regarded as making “informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities.”²⁷ For experiential-expressivists, theological language is regarded as expression of “noninformative and

²⁷ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 25th anniv. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 2.

nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations.”²⁸ Lindbeck regards Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of “liberal” theology, as exemplar of the liberal type. The experiential-expressive model of theological language reflects an inside-out way of knowing, which reflects the fact-value split and the subjectivism of modern philosophy.

Lindbeck’s analysis, however, goes beyond the traditional mapping by asserting that conservative theology can also reflect the experiential-expressive view of theological language and the inside-out way of knowing. He contends that

[i]t is much easier in our day for religious interests to take the experiential-expressivist form of individual quests for personal meaning. This is true even among theological conservatives, as is illustrated by the stress placed on conversion experiences by the heirs of pietism and revivalism. These structures of modernity press individuals to meet God first in the depths of their own souls and then, perhaps, if they find something personally congenial, to become part of a tradition or join a church.... The traditions of religious thought and practice into which Westerners are mostly likely to be socialized conceals from them the social origins of their conviction that religion is a highly private and individual matter.²⁹

Lindbeck’s analysis asserts that the conservative theologian can reflect the “structures of modernity” in a subjective orientation to Christianity where it is assumed or thought that God must first be met “in the depths of their own souls.” If that encounter with God becomes the point of reference for faith and conduct, rather than doctrine derived from the Scripture and accepted church practice, then theology becomes subjective no matter what a theologian or Christian may say in terms of formal affirmations of Scripture. The conviction then inevitably arises that “religion is a highly private and individual matter.” On such terms there can be no shared experience of Christianity in the Christian community. This results in fragmentation and no theological basis for being able to account for the church and a scripturally faithful account of

²⁸ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 2.

²⁹ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 8.

church unity. In terms of theological orientation, the external, divine Word and sacraments that are supposed to shape accepted doctrine and practice, along with the importance and place of a community of faith where such things are present, active, and defining, lose relevance and authority. The critical contention here is how conservative theology can reflect these things and thus reflect a determinative impact of modern philosophy on theology.

Lindbeck's analysis is also helpful in how it provides a way for discussing foundationalism in theology by referring to how modern philosophy makes Christian claims subject to philosophical frameworks or master narratives. Lindbeck discusses this problem as "extratextuality" where the modern theologian tends to think that the meaning of the biblical text is located and discovered outside of the text. In extratextuality, meaning is derived from an external philosophical (or scientific) framework. Such meaning is then brought to bear on the text in such a manner that the text is interpreted in light of the external framework.

Lindbeck himself argues for "intratextuality" where "theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text."³⁰ Lindbeck describes how in modernity "Scripture ceased to function as the lens through which theologians viewed the world and instead became primarily an object of study whose religiously significant or literal meaning was located outside itself."³¹ Lindbeck argues for making "the interpretive direction ... from the Bible to the world rather than vice versa."³² In intratextuality the believer is "to be conformed to the Jesus Christ depicted in the [biblical] narrative. An intratextual reading tries to derive the interpretive framework that designates the theologically controlling sense from the

³⁰ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 104.

³¹ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 105.

³² Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 104.

literary structure of the text itself.”³³ As such, an intratextual reading pushes back against the foundationalism of modern philosophy in theology.

With respect to theological language, Lindbeck proposes a “cultural-linguistic” model where doctrine and theological language function more like grammatical rules for understanding the religion. In his model, doctrine functions “as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action.”³⁴ Accordingly, Lindbeck argues for an “outside-in” orientation in theology in contrast to the “inside-out” way of knowing that is characteristic of modern philosophy. He explains that “liberals start with experience, with an account of the present, and then adjust their vision of the kingdom of God accordingly, while postliberals are in principle committed to doing the reverse.”³⁵ In the outside-in way of knowing, the ego is shaped by factors external to itself, rather than being the source of theology through an inner encounter with God that is treated as prior to or independent of any external thing and as the source of truth. Lindbeck’s appeal here is to Martin Luther’s insistence on the “superiority of the external over the internal word.”³⁶ Lindbeck wants to emphasize the role that language plays in forming religious experience, where it is “above all an external word, a *verbum externum*, that molds and shapes the self and its world, rather than an expression or thematization of a preexisting self or preconceptual experience.”³⁷ Lindbeck wants to reverse the relation of inner and outer such that “instead of deriving external features of a religion from inner experience, it is the inner experiences which are viewed as derivative.”³⁸ In other words, inner experience follows from and is generated by

³³ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 106.

³⁴ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 3–4.

³⁵ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 111–12.

³⁶ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, xxxii, emphasis added.

³⁷ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 20.

³⁸ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 20.

and through the Word. In such a way, it can be posited that the ego must look to the external Word of God and the sacraments and accepted church doctrine and practice based upon them as the point of reference for shaping and directing the individual's faith, assurance of God's grace and salvation, and conduct, as well as the faith and conduct of the church and its ministers. In this connection, Lindbeck recognizes how theological language has a "performative" function, as in Speech Act Theory.³⁹ This paper shares Lindbeck's aspirations with respect to the external Word.

Hans Frei

Hans Frei's typology of modern theology also moves beyond the traditional mapping by focusing the point of analysis on how theology relates to philosophy. As such, his analysis can expose how philosophy can operate determinatively for conservative theology as it does for liberal theology. Frei's analysis focuses on the uniqueness of Jesus and the Gospel because modern philosophy's assumptions work against their uniqueness. In this connection, Frei points out how modern philosophy has created a tension in theological method that has haunted academic theology for two hundred years. On one side of this tension, theology is understood as "a generally accessible subject matter broadly based, both as a technical concept and as a wider cultural one."⁴⁰ On other side of this tension, theology is viewed as "an aspect of the self-description of Christianity as a religion, rather than an instance in a general class."⁴¹ The tension involves how various *external* descriptions of human nature, the world, religion, God, redemption, etc., relate to Christianity's own *internal* descriptions of these things. The

³⁹ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 51.

⁴⁰ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 19–20.

⁴¹ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 20.

uniqueness of Jesus and the Christian Gospel get lost when Christianity is viewed as an instance in a general class. Viewing Christianity as an instance in a general class is reflected in modern historical criticism which “arranges events into a naturally explicable sequence of similar occurrences.”⁴² Historical criticism cannot, therefore, recognize “someone who is an exception to the rules under which the method works,”⁴³ such as Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ could not be unique “by definition,”⁴⁴ irrespective of the actual eyewitness experience of people as reflected in the NT.

Theoretically, conservative theology claims to be done in the way of Christian self-description, while liberal theology and historical criticism have tended to view Christianity as an instance in a general class. It may be surprising, therefore, that Donald A. Hagner, in his “Introduction” to George Eldon Ladd’s revised edition of *New Testament Theology*, writes that “[w]hat remains vitally important, however, is that these methods be seen as supplementary to, and not as displacing, the historical-critical method. *The latter must continue to hold its fundamental place in the interpretation of the biblical documents. It is nothing less than indispensable.*”⁴⁵ One can legitimately wonder how the uniqueness of Jesus and the Christian Gospel can be maintained for conservative theology if historical criticism of the NT is indispensable. Similarly, the uniqueness of Jesus and the Gospel can get lost in a concept of

⁴² Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 10.

⁴³ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 10.

⁴⁴ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 10.

⁴⁵ Donald A. Hagner, in his “Introduction” to *A Theology of the New Testament* written by George Eldon Ladd, rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 16–17, emphasis added. At the time that Hagner wrote these words he was the George Eldon Ladd Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary. According to Hagner, “Introduction,” 19, Ladd employed historical criticism of the Scriptures “but in a modified form that allow[ed] him to remain open to the possibility of the transcendent and thus enabl[ed] him to do justice to the content of the materials being studied.” Using historical criticism and being open to the “transcendent” is a methodological problem, however, that will inevitably skew the results since the historical-critical method already eschews transcendence as a basic assumption.

general revelation that seeks to answer the questions posed by modern philosophy. Carl Henry's theology of revelation will serve as an example of this. If the uniqueness of Jesus and the Gospel do in fact get lost in the development of a theology of revelation, then Frei's analysis indicates that such theology is operating under the foundational influence of modern philosophy. In this way Frei's analysis moves beyond the traditional mapping because it can expose how the problem of obscuring the uniqueness of Jesus and the claims of the Gospel that arises from the foundationalism of modern philosophy can beset both liberal and conservative theology.

Frei's typology of modern theology is important, therefore, because he provides analytical insight and conceptuality for identifying how modern philosophy operates foundationally for theology and how to sort out the relationship of theology to philosophy. When philosophy provides "the *criteria* of meaning and certainty, coherence as well as truth," as well as when it arbitrates for theology "what may at any time and anywhere count as meaningful language, genuine thought, and real knowledge," it is operating foundationally.⁴⁶ Philosophy is also operating foundationally when it is driving the questions that must be answered and providing the epistemological framework for answering those questions. It is also operating foundationally when it determines whether any claim can properly be regarded as true and admitted to the public sphere. Frei's analysis moves beyond the traditional mapping because it does not foreclose the possibility that philosophy may be operating foundationally for conservative theology, even though conservative theology makes formal affirmations pertaining to inspiration of Scripture and denies that theology should be subject to philosophy.

Frei illustrated how philosophy operates foundationally in relation to theology when he discussed the formation of the University of Berlin in 1810. His description also illustrates how

⁴⁶ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 20, emphasis added.

public theology works. The University of Berlin's formation is significant because it became the paradigm for universities in Germany, Western Europe, and the United States. Frei explains that the University of Berlin was formed on the assumption that

the business of the university is to teach the young to regard everything from the point of view of *Wissenschaft*, to see everything particular not for itself but in its nearest scientific relations and insert it into a wide common frame, in steady relation to the unity and totality of knowledge, so that they may learn in all thinking to become conscious of the basic laws of *Wissenschaft*.⁴⁷

Frei described *Wissenschaft* as “the inquiry into the universal, rational principles that allow us to organize any and all specific fields of inquiry into internally and mutually coherent, intelligible totalities; ... as ‘an inquiry into the transcendental principles justifying all systematic method and explanation.’”⁴⁸ Theology could only be admitted through the doors of “the higher educational representatives of the culture” on terms “common, or at least not demonstrably contrary, to the rules for academic discipline in the institutions of higher learning in this culture.”⁴⁹ Frei explains further that these rules were “academic freedom from all extrinsic authority, and loyalty to public, generally valid, intersubjective modes of explanation (*Wissenschaft*, once again), as well as to the justification of such explanations (*Wissenschaftstheorie*,⁵⁰ or *Wissenschaftslehre*,⁵¹ as Germans call it).”⁵² It was also assumed that “in the name of objectivity the university teaches atheistic humanism.”⁵³ Transcendental philosophy (examined below as modern idealism) was viewed as the nearest discipline to theology, which made it a suitable candidate to evaluate

⁴⁷ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 110.

⁴⁸ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 98.

⁴⁹ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 121.

⁵⁰ The theory of scientific or systematic knowledge reflected in *Wissenschaft*.

⁵¹ The doctrine or teaching of the scientific or systematic body of knowledge reflected in *Wissenschaft*.

⁵² Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 121.

⁵³ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 103.

theology's admission to the university.⁵⁴ Theology became accountable to transcendental philosophy because such philosophy provided "the theoretical justification for all explanation."⁵⁵ In the pattern of the University of Berlin, theology is regarded as primarily an academic discipline subject to philosophy and not a discipline in and for the sake of the church.

As an alternative to foundationalism, Frei proposed that philosophy be used as "an informative science, which tells you, for example, what being is, and how you get into a position to know it, and in what respects God has or is being, and in what respects [God] surpasses it."⁵⁶ Though it is not clear that philosophy stays within the informative mode if it is able to say in what respect God has being, Frei's overall point is well taken in the sense of using philosophy as an "informative science" rather than foundationally. Accordingly, Christian theology should be regarded as an aspect of Christian self-description, where Christianity is viewed as a specific religion, on its own terms, rather than "as an instance in a general class" defined by philosophy, or in further development by some sociology or philosophy of religion. Rather, Christian theology should "consist of "an inquiry into the internal logic of the Christian community's language ... exhibited in its use in worship and Christian life, as well as in the confessions of Christian belief," undertaken from the standpoint and benefit of the church."⁵⁷

Using the foregoing considerations, Frei evaluated certain theologians in relation to foundationalism and Christian self-description. Frei referred to Gordon Kaufman, who thought of theology as a philosophical discipline in the academy that "takes complete priority over

⁵⁴ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 122.

⁵⁵ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 126.

⁵⁶ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 20.

⁵⁷ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 20.

Christian self-description within the ... Church.”⁵⁸ Frei also thought Kaufman regarded theology as a philosophical discipline “undertaken as part of a general intellectual-cultural inquiry.”⁵⁹ For Frei, therefore, Kaufman represents theology being absorbed into *Wissenschaft*.

Similarly, Frei thought David Tracy regarded theology as a philosophical or academic discipline “subject to judgment and evaluation by certain basic general criteria” provided by philosophy.⁶⁰ Frei thought Tracy’s view of theology moved slightly away from Kaufman’s, however, because theology for Tracy is “also explication of the Christian religion or the Christian ‘fact,’ which has a real specificity of its own.”⁶¹ Frei saw Tracy as positing two sources of theology: (1) general criteria provided by philosophy and (2) the Christian “fact.”

Problematically, however, Tracy also insisted that the two sources must be correlated with each other pursuant to a general anthropology developed out of a philosophical phenomenism.

Accordingly, Tracy’s anthropology provided a universal hermeneutic as the lens through which Christian texts were to be read. Frei explains that for Tracy “there is a general structure presupposed in all intelligent exegesis, a kind of prescriptive rule that explains how it is possible for us to understand any and all discourse, especially texts.”⁶² Such typical characteristics are discovered and provided by philosophy. As a result, there does not appear to be much distance between Tracy and Kaufman. Tracy maintains that Christian theology has a *moral obligation* to correlate with all other branches of human learning, as he asserts that

in principle, the fundamental loyalty of the theologian *qua* theologian is to that morality of scientific knowledge which he shares with his colleagues, the philosophers, historians, and social scientists. No more than they, can he allow his

⁵⁸ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 28.

⁵⁹ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 30.

⁶⁰ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 30–32.

⁶¹ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 31.

⁶² Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 32.

own—or his tradition’s—beliefs serve as warrants for his arguments. In fact, in all properly theological inquiry, the analysis should be characterized by those same ethical stances of autonomous judgment, critical reflection, and properly skeptical hard-mindedness that characterize analysis in other fields.⁶³

“[A]utonomous judgment, critical reflection, and properly skeptical hard-mindedness,” however, are characteristic traits of modern thought and have given rise to liberal theology. As such, the church as the necessary context for the use of Christian concepts and language was not relevant for Tracy.⁶⁴ For him, Christian theology must be re-cast in a manner consistent with other branches of learning. Christian theology could not make any unique claims.

Frei thought that Friedrich Schleiermacher “had no doubt that [theology] was *at least* equally and quite independently Christian self-description within the religious community called the Church.”⁶⁵ Accordingly, Frei thought that Schleiermacher did not regard theology as a philosophical discipline. That is surprising, however, because Frei otherwise explains how Christian theology for Schleiermacher consisted of reflection on Christian statements as “*internal expressions of ... a universal human condition* (religion, or the feeling of absolute dependence).”⁶⁶ Such an understanding of theology sounds like treating Christianity as an instance in a general class, and not on its own terms as Christian self-description. Like Tracy, Schleiermacher developed his theology on the basis of a treatment of human nature developed out of a philosophical phenomenology.

Frei pointed to Karl Barth (d. 1968) as an example of sorting out the relationship of theology to philosophy in a non-foundationalist way.⁶⁷ Frei viewed Barth as holding that

⁶³ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 7.

⁶⁴ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 33.

⁶⁵ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 35, emphasis original.

⁶⁶ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 35, emphasis added.

⁶⁷ In summarizing Frei’s evaluation of Barth, it should not be supposed that this writer is adopting Barth’s

“theology as critical Christian self-reflection or self-description ... has priority over theology as an academic discipline.”⁶⁸ Theology was supposed to be “a function of the Church” that “arises because the Church is accountable to God for its discourse about God,”⁶⁹ which is to say that theology is not philosophically grounded.

It must be noted that Barth did not think it possible for theology to completely exclude philosophy. He thought that without some kind of philosophy or general theory “we simply couldn’t read.”⁷⁰ The point that Frei wants to make about Barth is that philosophy must be subordinated to theology in the theological task. Barth wanted the use of any general criteria to be “governed by the specific theological issue at hand, and by the general rule that absolute priority be given to Christian theology as Christian self-description within the religious community called the Church.”⁷¹ Frei views Barth as holding that any rules or criteria obtained from philosophy must be subordinated to the use of biblical or Christian language so “that one will not be tempted to prescribe rules for [Christian theology] but allow the rules to be fragmentary if that is what the proper and consistent use of [Christian] language seems to imply. There can be ... no single, articulable, super-rule for the way in which Christian language is used.”⁷² Frei reads Barth for the proposition that “the text means what it says, and so the reader’s redescription is just that, a redescription and not the discovery of the text as symbolic

theology or theological method *in toto*. Rather, Frei’s account here is being used to identify some useful thought from Barth about the relationship of theology to philosophy. The way Barth delineates this relationship has affinity with this project because Speech Act Theory, as a certain philosophical development, will be used in support of Christian self-description in critique of modern philosophy, while also not being used foundationally.

⁶⁸ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 38.

⁶⁹ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 39.

⁷⁰ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 85.

⁷¹ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 41

⁷² Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 42.

representation of something else more profound.”⁷³ If Barth had a general criterion it was a “criterion [of] appropriateness to the subject matter” where “the criterion must be rules governed by the context and not imposed on it.”⁷⁴

Frei’s and Lindbeck’s analyses of modern theology are helpful for they identify how Christian theology has been subjected in the modern age to the criticism and judgment of philosophical frameworks of thought that are foreign to Christianity. They provide a useful analytical posture by asking whether theology is being shaped by philosophy or by Christianity’s own sources and pursuant to its own language and logic. This analysis is helpful with respect to the problems of liberal theology. It can also help expose whether philosophy is operating foundationally in conservative theology, as well. Frei’s analysis of Barth is additionally helpful because it can provide guidance in using philosophy in theology in a way that benefits theology with Christian self-description “being in charge.” This project intends to explore the contours of Speech Act Theory in such a way.

Why Speech Act Theory

This project involves exploring how developments in Speech Act Theory can be significant in critiquing modern philosophy in relation to the problems of public theology, subjectivism, and secularism, as well as the fact-value split, while also supporting Christian self-description. The possibility of using Speech Act Theory arises from the contention that language can be used not only to describe a state of affairs in the world, as in a proposition, but also to bring a state of affairs into existence through a speech act. Speech Act Theory, which has been developed out of the phenomenon of the speech act, can account for biblical statements and features of Law and

⁷³ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 44.

⁷⁴ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 45.

Gospel that are not propositions, such as commands and promises. It can also account for the relationship between sense perception, speech, and faith, not only with respect to individual faith but also with respect to faith held by a community. As such, it can account for eye-witness claims to the resurrection of Jesus and how such claims gave rise to the Gospel and the Christian community.

These implications arise because the speech act shows that human language can be used by the human mind to bring states of affairs into existence in certain ways. As a result, the speech act reveals causal connections between the human mind and the physical world and between speech and affective psychological states that are not recognized in modern philosophy. The connection between the human mind and the physical world revealed by the speech act generates additional implications pertaining to sense perception, deism, subjectivism, and the fact-value split. The speech act, therefore, can become an entry point into a full-scale critique of modern philosophy's assumptions in aid of theology. John R. Searle engaged in such a full-scale critique of modern philosophy. This project will use his development of Speech Act Theory for help in addressing problems in theology posed by modern idealism's foundationalism, subjectivism, and secularism.

This project will proceed as follows. First, it will develop an understanding of modern philosophy by going back to its roots in René Descartes (d. 1650) with a nod also to Immanuel Kant (d. 1804). Descartes is vitally important because he is regarded as the originator of modern philosophy. Kant is significant because he solidified modern philosophy's characteristic inside-out way of knowing in the "turn to the subject," the human ego. Their thought relates directly to the problems of the fact-value split and public theology, subjectivism, and secularism. After setting forth the tenets of Descartes' thought, the impact of modern philosophy in

conservative theology will be explored by focusing on the theology of revelation of Carl Henry. Other twentieth century theologians in modern evangelicalism will also be cited, such as, Francis Schaeffer. Finally, Speech Act Theory will be explored to see how its concepts, particularly as developed by John Searle, can be helpful both in critiquing modern idealism and in providing support for Christian self-description as seen in the patterns and structure of the Gospel in the NT, what this project will refer to as the “taxonomy of the Gospel.” Speech Act theory as a philosophy of language will be used according to the way in which Hans Frei articulated the relationship between philosophy and theology in his discussion of Karl Barth, as explained above.

CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION TO MODERN PHILOSOPHY AND ITS ORIGINS

Modern philosophy developed out of important philosophers in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries. Their thought continues to shape how people in America think today. Two critically important and original thinkers were René Descartes (d. 1650) and Immanuel Kant (d. 1804). Descartes was important as the originator and pioneer of modern thought. Kant is important for how he developed Descartes' skepticism and *cogito* into the "turn to the subject" as an essential characteristic of the modern outlook. In Descartes' thought, the "turn to the subject" was reflected in his arguments for the *cogito* as the bedrock of knowledge. The specific way he argued for the *cogito* is treated in the next chapter. This chapter provides a more general introduction to modern philosophy and its origins.

Descartes as Originator of Modern Philosophy

The specific characteristics of modern philosophy began with Descartes' thought. Jerrold Seigel relates how Georg Hegel responded with the name of Descartes when he was asked where modern philosophy began. Hegel asserted that modern philosophy began with Descartes because he was "the first person who made the modern project of gaining reliable knowledge of the world depend on the certainty of his own conscious self-existence. In Descartes, individual rationality declared its radical freedom from authority and staked its claim to think (and in part to live) by the light of its own independent powers."¹

Bryan Magee also considers Descartes to be the inaugurator of modern philosophy.² Magee

¹ Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self; Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 55.

² Bryan Magee, *Confessions of a Philosopher: A Personal Journey through Western Philosophy from Plato to*

argues that Descartes' "programmatically division of total reality into observer and observed, subject and object, mind and matter, had got into Western man's way of looking at almost everything over hundreds of years, and in particular into the scientific way of looking at things."³ Magee contends that "at the dawn of modern science Descartes had developed thinking for oneself, independently of any authority, into a systematically constructed method of enquiry."⁴ This is to say that Descartes' methods of investigating physically, measurable phenomena, such as matter and extension, by the use of mathematics led him "to the idea of fundamental science as a mathematically based physics."⁵ Magee explains that "Descartes believed he had shown such a science to be possible, in the sense both of lying within human powers and of fitting reality [so] that along with such men as Francis Bacon and Galileo he played a crucial role in selling to educated Western man the desirability of developing such a science."⁶ Accordingly, Magee explains how Descartes believed that such a science "would have all the certainty of the mathematics that formed part of its foundations, indeed that it would ... actually consist in the quest for this very particular and certain kind of knowledge."⁷ In light of these things, Magee concludes that "more than any other single person, [Descartes] established the quest for certainty at the centre of Western science and philosophy, where it remained for three hundred years."⁸ Magee is pointing out that Descartes' main purpose was to place the quest of the new science being developed by Galileo on the footing of a way of knowing that would provide indubitable

Popper (New York: The Modern Library, 1997), 95.

³ Magee, *Confessions of a Philosopher*, 95, 311–12.

⁴ Magee, *Confessions of a Philosopher*, 312.

⁵ Magee, *Confessions of a Philosopher*, 312.

⁶ Magee, *Confessions of a Philosopher*, 312.

⁷ Magee, *Confessions of a Philosopher*, 312.

⁸ Magee, *Confessions of a Philosopher*, 312.

certainty and would be universal.

In addition to Descartes' importance for the development of modern science, Descartes also brought about a fundamental shift in the relationship of philosophy to theology from the Middle Ages into the modern age. In the thought of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), for example, philosophy was the handmaiden of theology. Jeffrey Stout explains that the relationship between philosophy and theology was reversed in modernity in the sense that theology became subject to the dictates of philosophy, constituting a fundamental shift. This meant that the modern theologian no longer attempted to make himself or herself conform one's vision of reality to the biblical text. Rather, the interpretive process became critiquing the text by examining all evidence, whether internal or external, and judging it pursuant to that examination.⁹ Stout attributes this shift to Descartes, where "theology [had] already become the handmaiden of philosophy, reversing the Thomistic order of things."¹⁰

Descartes was not alone in the development of modern philosophy. John Locke (d. 1704) and Immanuel Kant (d. 1804) were huge contributors. Indeed, Magee thinks that John Locke was Descartes' "immediate successor in the central tradition of Western philosophy."¹¹ Contributions were also made by Thomas Hobbes (d. 1679), Baruch Spinoza (d. 1677), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (d. 1716), George Berkeley (d. 1753), and David Hume (d. 1776). Kant was particularly important because he formalized the inside-out way of knowing that is typical of the modern outlook. Descartes and Kant rise above the rest because they set the course for modern philosophy and established its basic assumptions. Accordingly, Rorty explains that "the very idea

⁹ Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 112.

¹⁰ Stout, *Flight from Authority*, 109.

¹¹ Magee, *Confessions of a Philosopher*, 95.

of ‘philosophy’ ... would make little sense without the Cartesian claim that by turning inward we could find ineluctable truth, and the Kantian claim that this truth imposes limits on the possible results of empirical inquiry.”¹² Thus, Descartes and Kant established the modern point of view that truth is found within the human mind and that understanding of the world is determined and shaped accordingly. This is the “turn to the subject.” As a result, a trajectory from Descartes to Kant becomes critically important to an understanding of the modern outlook, with Descartes as the originator.

Modern Philosophy as Modern Idealism and Kantian Developments

The modern philosophy developed in the trajectory from Descartes to Kant is known more precisely as modern idealism.¹³ Modern idealism was developed to establish a sure and certain footing for any knowledge of metaphysics, where metaphysics has to do with what is real, what

¹² Rorty, *Mirror of Nature*, 9.

¹³ The word “idealism” has been around in philosophy for a long time. Much ancient Greek philosophy, such as Plato’s thought, for example, could be considered a form of idealism (if that is the right word for it). Augustine’s thought took much from ancient idealism. Modern idealism, however, is not being regarded here as the same as ancient idealism. This paper is not offering any opinion, analysis, or research regarding how ancient and modern idealism may or may not be similar to each other, aside from what is stated in this footnote, and I am not assuming that they are the same or even similar. This is because Plato argued that there are universals that shape the external world and that such universals exist quite independently of the human mind, though the human mind can know them. As a result, universals do not appear to be treated as characteristics of the human mind by Plato. Moreover, in Plato’s thought there seems to be a connection between the universals and particular physical objects that exist in the world in the concept of “participation.” Such participation results in there being a meaningful epistemic connection between thought or the human mind and physical objects and the world by virtue of the universals; a connection that is not present in modern idealism. In that event, the human mind is regarded as constituted in a certain way to be able to grasp universals. It is still the case, however, that universals have a quite independent existence from the mind. When universals appear in language, language names something real. Modern idealism, on the other hand, asserts that what we have immediate knowledge of is features of our own minds that exist in our minds and which we bring to our experience of the world. It is by these features that we “order” and “construct” the world in our experience. The physical object is constituted by the mind, rather than by a universal that exists independently of the mind in which the object participates, a universal which the human mind can know. Modern idealism, therefore, seems to assert a different epistemology and metaphysics than Plato’s thought, with the result that this paper does not regard ancient and modern idealism to be the same. And since this paper is focused on the features of modern idealism and how they impact theology, ancient idealism does not come into focus as the subject matter of this study.

exists, and understanding the operations and nature of events that happen in the world.¹⁴

Metaphysics involves the question of the existence of God. It also asks about what exists as a bedrock question beneath all experience and sense perception of particular things. Accordingly, modern idealism is first and primarily concerned with epistemology, that is, the examination of how we know what we think we know, or examination of claims to knowledge.

The central characteristic of modern idealism is that what we know consists of features of our own minds. This constitutes the inside-out way of knowing and modernity's famous "turn to the subject." Paul Guyer and Rolf-Peter Horstmann explain that in modern idealism "everything that we can know about mind-independent 'reality' is held to be so permeated by the creative, formative, or constructive activities of the mind ... that all claims to knowledge must be considered, in some sense, to be a form of self-knowledge."¹⁵ John Searle similarly explains that in modern idealism "reality is constituted by our perceptions and other sorts of representations. Instead of thinking of our claims to knowledge as being answerable to an independently existing reality, we make reality answerable to our own representations."¹⁶

Searle's description of modern idealism succinctly captures the difference between the inside-out and outside-in ways of knowing. Reality being answerable to our own representations constitutes the inside-out way of knowing, where reality is conceived according to the particular thought or aims of the philosopher or scientist. In the outside-in way of knowing, claims to knowledge are answerable to and can be corrected by an independently existing reality that can

¹⁴ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method for Conducting One's Reason Well and for Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, 3rd ed., trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998), 21, where he indicates that he is reasoning about the "question of metaphysical certitude."

¹⁵ Paul Guyer and Rolf-Peter Horstmann, "Idealism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2015, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/idealism>.

¹⁶ John R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 16.

be known and shape thought and belief. When claims to knowledge are answerable to an independently existing reality, the human knowing subject can be called into question and shaped by external factors. In an outside-in way of knowing, it is meaningful to talk about there being a shared world that a number of humans can access and know together. It is also then meaningful in a Christian theological context to talk about humans being shaped in their beliefs, values, and behavior by God's actions in physical reality, such as, by Jesus' resurrection or by His word and sacrament.

Descartes is central to these considerations regarding how knowledge relates to the external world because, as Leen Spruit explains, he “reversed the order that had characterized the Aristotelian view of knowledge acquisition: [in Descartes] nothing is received from the senses that was not first in the intellect.”¹⁷ This is the inside-out way. In Descartes' idealism, the intellect first determines what could be true. There is no theoretical framework for being able to affirm a shared world that exists independently of the mind that the mind can know.

Kant contributed to the establishment of modern idealism by arguing that there are structures in the human mind that construct physical reality for human beings in their perception of the world. These structures give shape to sense perception, which Kant calls appearances. Kant argued that only by means of fundamental concepts that are in the mind “can appearances belong to knowledge or even to our consciousness, and so to ourselves.”¹⁸ In this vein, Kant went on to contend that the faculty of understanding in the human mind “is something more than a power of formulating rules through comparison of appearances; *it is itself the lawgiver of nature.*

¹⁷ Leen Spruit, *Species Intelligibilis from Perception to Knowledge: Renaissance Controversies, Later Scholasticism, and the Elimination of the Intelligible Species in Modern Philosophy* (New York: Brill, 1995), 2:388. Similarly, Bayer, *Theology*, 135–36, explains that in modern idealism “an external thing cannot change anything inside us until it is remembered, appropriated, and seen as a possibility latent within.”

¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 147.

Save through it, nature, that is, [the] synthetic unity of the manifold of appearances according to rules, would not exist at all (for appearances, as such, cannot exist outside us—they exist only in our sensibility).”¹⁹ Kant is saying that the mind’s perception of external objects consists of appearances that exist in the mind and that those appearances are constructed by features of our minds, not by features of the world. He is also saying that we know nothing about the world because it is only the appearances in our minds that we actually know.

Kant fully understood how radical his thinking was. He asserted that up to his time “it [had] been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects.”²⁰ Kant thought, however, that prior attempts to show how our knowledge must conform to objects had failed.²¹ Kant was thinking of the failures of natural science until the discoveries of Galileo on motion, Torricelli on air pressure, and Stahl on metal oxides.²² Kant interpreted those discoveries as demonstrating that idealism is correct, namely, that “reason has insight only into that which it produces *after a plan of its own*, and that it must not allow itself to be kept ... in nature’s leading-strings, but must itself show the way with principles of judgment based upon fixed laws, constraining nature to give answer to questions of reason’s own determining.”²³ To do this, Kant sought to establish knowledge on the basis of “pure” reason, “absolutely independent of all experience” with “no admixture of anything empirical.”²⁴ Oswald Bayer explains that “Kant insisted on the immediacy, on the unconditionality and purity of reason. What is not purely rational, but empirical and historical, is not worthy to be a criterion of truth, can never settle claims to

¹⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 148, emphasis added.

²⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 22.

²¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 22.

²² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 20.

²³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 20, emphasis original.

²⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 43.

validity.”²⁵ Thus, an historical event, like Jesus’ resurrection, could not be a criterion of truth in relation to God and could never settle any claims to validity, whether with respect to its own occurrence or to anything else. In Kant’s thinking, objects are constituted through pure reason, that is to say, “objects, as appearances, conform to our mode of representation.”²⁶ He gives quintessential expression to modern idealism in the contention that “the order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle *nature*, we ourselves introduce.”²⁷ The inside-out way of knowing came into its own. Kant refers to this way of thinking as “transcendental philosophy” because “[t]ranscendental philosophy is ... a philosophy of pure and merely speculative reason.”²⁸ It is transcendental because knowledge of the world is determined in the mind independent of any experience of the world. The mind is free in the power of its own conceptuality.

Kant’s thought presupposed key features of Descartes’ thought. These features were Descartes’ concept of “idea” as a mental phenomenon consisting of a representation of the idea’s object and his representative theory of perception (RTP). These features were presuppositions to Kant’s contention that appearances of external objects are constructed by structures in the mind and not by the objects themselves.²⁹ Descartes’ concepts of “idea” and the RTP are discussed in detail in the next two chapters.

Arthur Schopenhauer (d. 1860) likened Kant’s philosophy to waking from a dream. He

²⁵ Oswald Bayer, *A Contemporary in Dissent: Johann Georg Hamann as a Radical Enlightener*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 152.

²⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 24.

²⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 147.

²⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 61.

²⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 24, assumes the Cartesian concepts of “idea” and the RTP when he asserts that “our representation of things, as they are given to us, does not conform to these things as they are in themselves.”

thought that the greatest merit of Kant's philosophy was its idealism. According to Schopenhauer, "*Kant's greatest merit is the distinction of the phenomenon from the thing-in-itself*, based on the proof that between things and us there always stands the *intellect*."³⁰ Schopenhauer is referring to a huge implication of Kant's thought, namely, that if in sense perception, the mind constructs a representation of a physical object pursuant to the mind's own structures, then there must be a distinction between that representation and the actual object. Schopenhauer refers to the actual object as "the thing-in-itself," the "Ding an sich" in German. By the word "distinction" Schopenhauer means that the representation and the actual object are two different things and that what the mind knows is its representation of the object, not the object itself.³¹ We will see how Descartes formulated this idealistic framework of thought prior to Kant by distinguishing between what the senses perceive with respect to objects and what objects are in their essence. In Descartes' thought, the essence of things is perceived by the mind alone, apart from the senses. In the distinction between the object and the mind's representation of the object, the "intellect" stands between the object and the mind and constructs the object for the mind. The mind does not actually know the object itself.

Kant's conception of epistemology gives rise to a modern understanding of the human being as the "transcendental subject." Kant understands sense perception to consist of the synthetic unity of appearances contained subjectively in the knowing subject. The synthetic unity of appearances is brought about by the structures in the human mind. The world as perceived by the senses is chaotic. The mind orders the world into a synthetic unity in the knowing subject.

³⁰ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, reprint ed., trans. E. F. J. Payne (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1966), 1:417, emphasis original.

³¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 82, states that "[w]hat objects may be in themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility, remains completely unknown to us."

This knowing subject became the “transcendental subject,” which became the dominant conception of the self in modernity. In this conception, the self is known as the subject because the self, not the world, is the point of reference for what can be known, and the self makes order of the world. The self is conceived of as “transcendent” because it stands before and above experience of the world and determines all knowledge that could pertain to experience of the world. In this transcendent posture the self is posited as absolutely free. The self’s standpoint in relation to the world is conceived of as being the determining subject and also as “objective.” As the transcendental subject, the self can remove itself from experience in the world and view the world from a transcendent standpoint in its transcendent freedom.

This concept of self began with Descartes. In Kant’s development, it became an assumption of modern thought, which can be seen in subsequent thinkers. Seigel traces the concept of Kant’s transcendental subject through the history of subsequent modern thought, and even into thinkers that have been regarded as post-modern. Seigel does this in commenting on Jacques Derrida, where he states:

[Derrida’s] image of unobjectifiable, forever non-finite being has a certain lineage, one that goes back through Heidegger and Nietzsche (on whose work Derrida drew in imagining it) to Schopenhauer and Hegel (whom Derrida recognized as a predecessor) and through them to Schelling, Fichte, and Kant. What Schopenhauer called cosmic will, Hegel spirit, Schelling the absolute, and Fichte the absolute ego in its pure activity, all had their roots in the Kantian transcendental subject, the source and generator of absolute freedom by virtue of existing in a space prior to all objectification.³²

To the extent Kant reflects Descartes’ concept of the ego, as discussed below, free from all material connections and existing in a concept of pure reason, Descartes becomes the originator, in the long history of modern philosophical thought that involves striving for a transcendent “I,”

³² Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 647. Similarly, John R. Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are: A Theory of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 223, thinks that modern idealism survived into the twentieth century in the work of Heidegger, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty.

free of any material, physical, or moral constraints, and able to judge all things in a space of absolute freedom “prior to all objectification,” as Seigel puts it. The transcendental subject will appear in conservative theology where the epistemological framework of modern idealism is present and active.

Kant regards the ordering of appearances which he refers to as “nature” as at the same time subjective and objective, which appears contradictory. It is subjective because nature as the synthetic unity of appearances comes about or exists “in the original cognitive powers of our mind.”³³ This is truly a subjective concept of knowledge since nature is regarded as being *constructed* by the cognitive powers of the mind. Nevertheless, Kant regarded the mind’s ordering of nature as objective on the grounds that subjective conditions for “the possibility of knowing any object whatsoever” could not give any genuine knowledge of objects if the subjective conditions “were not at the same time objectively valid.”³⁴

Such objectivity, however, seems to be just positing and mere assertion. Kant recognizes that on the terms of his epistemology, the knower does not know the object itself precisely because the object is constructed by the cognitive powers of the mind. As a result, there is no way the knower could have any confidence on the terms of Kant’s epistemology that the appearances in the mind of external objects are actually consistent with and accurately represent those objects. In other words, on the terms of Kant’s epistemology, a person does not actually have knowledge of the world. Thus, there is a deep skepticism lurking in Kant’s epistemology that arises precisely because Kant posits that the mind constructs reality pursuant to its own power. Kant, therefore, had to attribute objectivity to the subjective conditions of the mind to

³³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 147.

³⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 147.

avoid skepticism and the implication of mere subjectivism. The specter of skepticism and subjectivism arise because one only knows the appearances in the mind on Kant's terms and, therefore, has no way of knowing if those appearances accurately reflect the object in the external world. If, therefore, skepticism and subjectivism are the logical outcome of Kant's epistemology, if they are implicit in Kant's way of knowing, then his claim for the objectivity of the structures of the mind would be no more than mere assertion and fideism. His claim to the objectivity of the mind would be *logically* empty because subjectivism is the logical outcome of his thought. Kant's claims to objectivity notwithstanding, subjectivism and skepticism are implicit in the logic of his thought and have been a perennial problem for philosophy in the modern age, and so also for theology. Descartes, however, had already brought skepticism and subjectivism into modern epistemology prior to Kant.

Kant's development of idealism had a profound impact. It is reflected in the thought of Georg W. F. Hegel (d. 1831) who regarded

[Reason] [as] infinite *form*, for only in its image and by its fiat do phenomena arise and begin to live. [Reason] as its own exclusive presupposition and absolutely final purpose, itself works out this purpose from potentiality to actuality, from inward source to outward appearance, not only in the natural but also in the spiritual universe, in world history. That this *Idea* or *Reason* is the True, the Eternal, the Absolute Power and it and nothing but it, its glory and majesty, manifests itself in the world ... has been proved in philosophy and is being presupposed here as proved.³⁵

Building on Kant's way of knowing Hegel asserted that history is nothing other than the working out of the human understanding as the lawgiver of nature. He elevated Kant's transcendental ego to new heights. He reconstructed the conception of the historian in Kantian terms when he claimed that the historian "brings his categories with him and sees the data through them."³⁶

³⁵ Georg W. F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, transl. Robert S. Hartman (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1997), 11, emphasis original.

³⁶ Hegel, *Reason in History*, 13. Philosophy determining reality would also become the Marxist way as well.

Richard Bernstein discusses how Kant's thought has impacted hermeneutics and has led to moral relativism in subsequent thinkers. Bernstein explains that Kant's idealism, as passed on through Hegel's concept of Reason, heavily influenced Martin Heidegger (d. 1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (d. 2002). Bernstein states that

[i]mplicit in Heidegger, and explicit in Gadamer, are two interrelated claims: the claim for the *ontological* significance of hermeneutics, and the claim for its *universality*. Hermeneutics is no longer conceived of as a subdiscipline of humanistic studies or even as the characteristic Method of the *Geisteswissenschaften*,³⁷ but rather as pertaining to questions concerning what human beings are.... [U]nderstanding is not one type of activity, to be contrasted with other human activities.... Understanding is universal and may properly be said to underlie and pervade all activities.³⁸

Bernstein is making the claim that, on Kantian grounds, Heidegger and Gadamer thought of "understanding," the endeavor of hermeneutics, as the endeavor that underlies all intellectual activity. All intellectual activity is hermeneutics, that is, interpretation. Such a view can be traced back to Kant's contention that the faculty of understanding in the human mind is the lawgiver of nature, which orders nature according to its own implicit structures. In such a view, meaning must reside in the understanding and cannot exist at all objectively in things and events in the world; it cannot be given to the mind by those things and events. As Rorty explains, Kant's thought makes it "possible to say that the question of what [is] real or true [is] not to be settled independently of a given conceptual framework, and this in turn seem[s] to suggest that perhaps

Russell, *History*, 783, explains how Marx rejected a former kind of "materialism," in which sensation was mistakenly regarded as passive, for his own view in which "all sensation or perception is an interaction between subject and object; the bare object, apart from the activity of the percipient, is mere raw material, which is transformed in the process of becoming known." This is the way of modern idealism. It can be seen, then, how this view of epistemology can be reflected in Karl Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach in relation to politics and government, where he states, applying modern idealist epistemology to politics: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it." See Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 145, emphasis original.

³⁷ This term can be taken to mean "those undertaking the science of spirit."

³⁸ Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1983), 113-14, emphasis original.

nothing really exist[s] apart from such frameworks.”³⁹ If human beings develop such frameworks prior to experience and interpret experience through such frameworks, then meaning is provided by the beholder or reader.⁴⁰ Relativism must result.

Bernstein explains, therefore, how Gadamer’s reliance on Kant’s epistemology leads to moral relativism. Bernstein does this by linking Kant’s notion of the “transcendental aesthetic” and Gadamer’s notion of “aesthetic differentiation.” In Kant’s notion of the transcendental aesthetic, the form of the sensation of anything external to the mind lies in the mind prior to experience.⁴¹ The result is, as we have seen, that the mind constructs objects for itself according to its own structures and knows only how the mind perceives objects to be.⁴² In Gadamer’s notion of aesthetic differentiation “we are to disregard everything in which a work of art is rooted, such as its original context and its secular or religious function, in order for the ‘pure work of art’ to stand out.”⁴³ In this way, the work of art is abstracted and disconnected from its original context. The problem is that abstracting the work of art from its original context would allow the viewer to interpret the work of art as he or she sees fit. But this reflects Kant’s quest to establish the object based on pure reason alone, abstracted from any empirical elements whatsoever. Kant’s abstracting from anything empirical in turn reflects Descartes’ quest to establish what is true on the basis of pure reasoning alone. The relativism that is involved in Gadamer’s notion of aesthetic differentiation, therefore, is based on Kant’s epistemology. It is as Bernstein comments that

³⁹ Rorty, *Mirror of Nature*, 275.

⁴⁰ Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 125.

⁴¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 66.

⁴² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 82.

⁴³ Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 119.

[o]nce we begin questioning whether there is a common faculty of taste (a *sensus communis*), we are really led down the path to relativism. And this is what did happen after Kant—so much so that today it is extraordinarily difficult to retrieve any idea of taste or aesthetic judgment that is more than the expression of personal preferences. Ironically (given Kant’s intentions), the same tendency has worked itself out with a vengeance with regard to all judgments of value, including moral judgments.⁴⁴

In the same vein as Bernstein, MacIntyre points out that Kant’s idealistic epistemology leads to “emotivism” in the field of ethics.⁴⁵ It should not be surprising, therefore, that Kant’s idealism leads to subjectivism in theology.

Kant’s epistemology has had a profound impact in modern thought, as has been shown. The basic assumptions of Kant’s epistemology, however, have a prior touchstone in Descartes, who asserted that knowledge of the essence of any physical object must be found in the intellect alone, independent of all sense perception of the object. Descartes also posited that the human ego is the ground of and ultimate point of reference for all knowledge. Therefore, Descartes’ thought must come into focus as the root of modern epistemology. Accordingly, the next section and chapters three and four will describe and analyze how Descartes laid the foundations for modern idealism. The first question to consider is what Descartes was trying to accomplish and how he set about to accomplish it. This question is known as Descartes’ quest.

Descartes’ Quest

Descartes wrote his philosophical works in pursuit of establishing an indubitably sure and certain foundation for knowledge. He wanted to establish a basis for knowledge that could not be rationally doubted. This is known as Descartes’ quest for certainty. He expressed it like this: “[R]eason now persuades me that I should withhold my assent no less carefully from opinions

⁴⁴ Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 119–20.

⁴⁵ See the discussion on “Subjectivism” in Chapter five below.

that are not completely certain and indubitable than I would from those that are patently false.”⁴⁶ In other words, if an opinion is not completely certain and indubitable, then it should be regarded as false, the implication being that only that opinion which is completely certain and indubitable could be regarded as knowledge. He appealed by analogy to Archimedes, in Greek mythology, who “sought but one firm and immovable point in order to move the entire earth from one place to another.”⁴⁷ Descartes thought that great things could be accomplished—he could metaphorically move the world—if he could find just one thing that he could know “is certain and unshaken.”⁴⁸ He argued that this one thing was the indubitable certainty of his own existence as a thinking thing, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Background of His Quest

The question arises as to why Descartes embarked on this quest for certainty. The situation was complex. Bernard Williams contends that Descartes pursued certainty to defeat the arguments of the skeptic, which were many in his time.⁴⁹ Descartes himself referred to atheists in response to whom he wanted to provide unassailable arguments for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul.⁵⁰ There was more to it, however. Descartes also doubted the validity of the philosophical and scientific knowledge he had been taught in school as the thought of the Middle Ages. He doubted the validity of sources of knowledge that he had previously regarded

⁴⁶ René Descartes, *Meditations, Objections, and Replies*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew and Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 9.

⁴⁷ Descartes, *Meditations*, 13.

⁴⁸ Descartes, *Meditations*, 13.

⁴⁹ Bernard Williams, “Bernard Williams on Descartes,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dIf7MapuqE> (1987) in an interview with Bryan Magee.

⁵⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 4.

as trustworthy.⁵¹ Descartes' quest for certainty is found in his two, main philosophical works, his *Discourse on the Method for Conducting One's Reason Well and for Seeking Truth in the Sciences* (1637) (the *Discourse*) and his *Meditations on First Philosophy and Objections* (1641) (the *Meditations*). In these philosophical works, Descartes set forth his famous *cogito* and argued for the existence of God, issues that were directly involved in his quest for certainty in establishing an epistemologically firm foundation for the natural sciences.

Descartes, however, wanted to do more in his quest than just respond to skeptics. He wrote the *Discourse* and the *Meditations* to support his own views about science, scientific method, and knowledge of the world that he had held long before he wrote these works. Prior to writing the *Discourse* and the *Meditations* he was known as a mathematician and a scientist. His views on science and knowledge of the world resulted from an experience of "intellectual illumination" that changed his life in 1618.⁵² Seigel relates that the gist of this "intellectual illumination" was "the idea that the secrets of nature could all be unlocked by the magic key of mathematics."⁵³ In this connection Descartes was fully on board with the "new science" represented by the

⁵¹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 9. Descartes, *Discourse*, 4–9, identified the doubtful sources of knowledge like this. He read fables in classical texts but found that "fables make one imagine many events to be possible which are not so at all." He had high regard for oratory and poetry but thought that they did not stem from "fruits of study." He regarded the writings of the ancients dealing with morals to be "very proud and very magnificent palaces that were built on nothing but sand." He held theology in reverence, but he thought that "revealed truths guiding us [to heaven] are beyond our understanding" such that "it would be necessary to have some extraordinary assistance from heaven and to be more than a man" in order to successfully examine such truths. He studied philosophers but found that even though they consisted of the most excellent minds "there still [was] nothing about which there [was] not some dispute, and consequently nothing that [was] not doubtful." He was aware of "false doctrines" which he identified as the "promises of an alchemist, the predictions of an astrologer, the tricks of a magician, or the ruses or boasts of any of those who profess to know more than they do." He traveled to other cultures and found great diversity in customs "commonly accepted and approved among other great peoples." Since the people of those cultures "use their reason as much as or more than we do," the diversity of customs yields no certainty of knowledge. He read many books but found that "book learning" contains reasonings that are only "probable," not consisting of any "demonstrations," being drawn from the opinions of many different people and therefore, not being certain.

⁵² Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 63.

⁵³ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 63.

Copernican revolution and Galileo's work. The "new science" pertained to Copernicus positing that the sun was at the center of the solar system, with the earth and the other planets revolving around it (the heliocentric model), rather than the earth being at the center with the sun revolving around the earth (the geocentric model). The geocentric model had its origins in Aristotle and was adopted by the Roman Catholic Church in its dogma as the only correct Christian view of the world. For Descartes, the new science involved regarding "all natural phenomena as appearances produced by forms of matter in motion."⁵⁴ What is most real operates beneath appearances. One must, therefore, know what is most real by a function of the intellect alone. Accordingly, Descartes thought that all natural phenomena could be described mathematically in terms of algebra and geometry.⁵⁵ His viewpoint included a negative view of sense perception because he thought that the geocentric model was rooted in ordinary sense perception while the heliocentric model was rooted in the mathematical reasoning of the intellect. His experience of "intellectual illumination," therefore, drew him away from sense experience of the world to an articulation of true and certain knowledge of the world that is rooted in the intellect alone.

For Galileo and Descartes there was an important epistemological issue at stake in whether the geocentric or heliocentric view of the world was correct. The issue was whether the senses deceive us as to "how things really are." It may appear from our perspective on earth through sense perception that the earth is stationary, and the sun moves. Upon intellectual reflection, however, Galileo realized that the earth moves as well, and that it moves around the sun. Accordingly, he regarded the senses as not providing reliable knowledge of the world. He also regarded the kinds of things the senses perceive, such as, relative position and movement, color,

⁵⁴ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 64.

⁵⁵ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 64.

taste, texture, odor, and the like, as not constituting essential qualities of objects themselves or as providing an accurate view of such objects. Such qualities were referred to by John Locke as “secondary qualities.”⁵⁶

If, however, secondary qualities were not essential qualities of objects themselves, then just what is the status of secondary qualities? Do they exist in the world? If secondary qualities are not essential qualities of objects, then are they purely mental, that is, subjective phenomena that exist only in the mind and not phenomena that exist in the world? Is the smell of chocolate chip cookies baking in the oven merely a subjective thing and, therefore, meaningful only “in the eyes of the beholder”? According to Norman Kemp Smith, Galileo did not come right out and say that secondary qualities are subjective.⁵⁷ Galileo’s treatment of the new science implies, however, that secondary qualities do not exist in the world. The point is that viewing natural phenomena as forms of matter in motion brought with it the view or assumption that the senses do not provide accurate knowledge of the way things are in the world since the senses seem to operate at the level of secondary qualities. More importantly, the new science, at least on Galileo’s terms, seems to imply that knowledge of the world is a purely intellectual activity. Descartes wanted to provide a theoretical and philosophical justification for that position.

Galileo’s thinking had an enormous impact on Descartes. Though it is not clear whether secondary qualities had a real existence for Descartes independent of the mind, he certainly thought that the essence of objects did not consist in those qualities. As will be shown below, he approached the essence of things in the world like Galileo did in terms of forms of matter in

⁵⁶ Magee, *Confessions of a Philosopher*, 95.

⁵⁷ Norman Kemp Smith, *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory of Knowledge* (London: MacMillan, 1924), 22, states that “Galileo does not ... go to the length of saying that secondary qualities are mental, but he quite definitely holds that they have no existence in the strictly physical realm. The sole reason which he assigns for this view is the fact that they are not in thought bound up with the concept of physical existence; and this of course means that they are not among the properties which are required to account for the behaviour of material bodies.”

motion and other general and essential characteristics that can only be grasped by the intellect in terms of mathematics, such essential characteristics being extension, duration, density, and the like.

The issue of whether secondary qualities exist in the world or the mind and how they relate to the essence of things is important because it persists in the natural sciences—or at least physics—today. Lee Smolin, a contemporary physicist, puts it like this: “*But what is a rock? We know what the rock looks like, what it feels like. But these are at least as much about us as they are about the rock. ... The solidity and hardness of the rock is a construction of our minds.*”⁵⁸ Smolin’s comment in the context of contemporary physics reflects modern idealism and its take on sense perception.

Nevertheless, the point of referring to Galileo’s work and how it impacted Descartes is to show that Descartes was committed to the view that knowledge of the world comes by mathematics through the intellect and not by sense perception long before he wrote his philosophical works that set out to prove such a view. Descartes assumed the unreliability of sense perception and that certainty of knowledge should be found in the reasoning of the intellect alone long before he developed these concepts in the *Discourse* and the *Meditations* in his philosophical quest for certainty. His negative view of sense perception was not just a posture of skepticism he assumed in the process of reaching the certainty of the *cogito*. His negative treatment of sense perception was his own view, with the result that it became a basic assumption of modern philosophy (and science) ever since.⁵⁹ As a basic assumption of modern philosophy and science, Descartes’ view of sense perception became a basic assumption in

⁵⁸ Lee Smolin, *Einstein’s Unfinished Revolution: The Search for What Lies Beyond the Quantum* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019), xv, emphasis original.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory*, 16.

modern theology, as well, making an analysis of the RTP important for theology.

There are additional factors that played into Descartes' quest. As a result of his interest in the new science and prior to writing his philosophical works, Descartes had set out to write a book that would explain all the phenomena seen in nature in a comprehensive scheme based on mathematics in a way that was a sort of precursor to modern physics.⁶⁰ He set out to do this in his book *The World*, which was not published until after his death. In this book, he tried to present a vision of the world based on the new science in contradistinction to the Ptolemaic physics and cosmology of the Middle Ages that relied on Aristotle. Then Galileo was condemned by the Roman Catholic inquisition in 1633 and his books burned.⁶¹ This event made Descartes leery of publishing *The World* because he thought his own work along the lines of the new science would receive the same fate as Galileo's.⁶² It also brought to the surface a concern he had had all along, that there would be conflict between religion, specifically the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church regarding the geocentric view of the solar system, and the new science. He set out in the *Discourse and Meditations*, therefore, to try to reconcile the new science with faith in God and the immortality of the soul. Seigel comments that "the uncompromising materialism with which [Descartes] considered the physical and biological world has been thought to have anti-theistic implications, but the very limitlessness of his cognitive ambitions seems to demand the presence of an intelligence behind phenomena to provide the order he sought to know there."⁶³ In addition, Seigel relates that Descartes' ambition of bringing all of the phenomena of nature together into a

⁶⁰ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 65.

⁶¹ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 68.

⁶² Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 67.

⁶³ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 68.

comprehensive explanation was becoming unrealistic.⁶⁴

The condemnation of Galileo, therefore, provided Descartes with an “out” and an “opportunity.” The “out” was being able “to retreat from the unachievable ambition of explaining all the phenomena of nature at a single stroke.”⁶⁵ The “opportunity” was to be able “to display his religious loyalty by highlighting the dependence of his knowledge on God’s power and beneficence.”⁶⁶ These reasons prompted Descartes to turn away from his ventures in science and to write his philosophical works in which he could present his arguments for the *cogito* and the existence of God. Descartes did this with the thought that he would be providing a philosophical basis for the new science based on mathematical reasoning alone that could not be assailed by doubt.

The Nature of Indubitably Certain Knowledge

It follows from Descartes’ adopting the new science that he regarded as doubtful the opinions he had learned as a youth based on an Aristotelean view of the world and science. So he thought that “[he] could not do better than to try to get rid of [those opinions] once and for all, in order to replace them later on, either with other ones that are better, or even with the same ones *once [he] had reconciled them to the norms of reason.*”⁶⁷ Accordingly, Descartes asserted in the *Discourse* that “[m]y plan has never gone beyond trying to reform my own thoughts and build[] upon a foundation which is completely my own.”⁶⁸ He asserted in the *Meditations*, therefore, “that once in my life I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original

⁶⁴ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 66.

⁶⁵ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 67.

⁶⁶ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 67.

⁶⁷ Descartes, *Discourse*, 8, emphasis added.

⁶⁸ Descartes, *Discourse*, 9.

foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences.”⁶⁹ Descartes’ commitment to the new science also required him to deny that culture, education, Christian tradition, and sense perception could provide reliable knowledge since all of those things up to that time taught the geocentric model and an Aristotelean based or influenced physics and cosmology.⁷⁰

What, therefore, does indubitably certain knowledge consist of for Descartes? There are two things. First, indubitably certain knowledge must consist of clear and distinct ideas.⁷¹ If an idea is clear and distinct, it could not be doubted. He held that “everything I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true.”⁷² Second, indubitably certain knowledge must involve deductive reasoning in a deductive system of thought that would have the force of demonstrations akin to mathematics and geometry.⁷³ Rational, deductive demonstrations provide certainty because conclusions follow “necessarily” from higher principles or premises on the basis of logic and mathematical reasoning.⁷⁴ Conversely, Descartes regarded the sources of knowledge that he had relied on in his youth as doubtful because they rested on probability. Descartes regarded any

⁶⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 9.

⁷⁰ Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 11–15.

⁷¹ Descartes, *Discourse*, 11.

⁷² Descartes, *Meditations*, 19.

⁷³ Descartes, *Discourse*, 11, asserted that “[t]hose long chains of utterly simple and easy reasonings that geometers commonly use to arrive at their most difficult demonstrations had given me occasion to imagine that *all* the things that can fall within human knowledge follow from one another in the same way [emphasis added].” Norman Kemp Smith, *New Studies in the Philosophy of Descartes: Descartes as Pioneer* (London: MacMillan, 1952), 20, explains Descartes’ quest like this: “That ideal can be briefly stated in terms of two essential requirements: (1) that we start with what is so simple and evident as to be indubitable; and (2) that in advancing from the simple to the complex no step be taken that is not similarly indubitable. These are the positions to which already at this early period—prior to any formulation of his *cogito ergo sum* argument—Descartes stands definitively committed.” The “ideal” to which Smith refers is Plato’s claim that one can hope to attain to knowledge in other and higher fields through geometry.

⁷⁴ Descartes, *Meditations*, 41.

source of knowledge that was merely probable to be more or less false.⁷⁵ True knowledge for him could only be found in demonstrations and judgments that present themselves to the mind clearly and distinctly and follow necessarily. At rock bottom he claimed that he had a clear and distinct idea that he himself necessarily exists as a thinking thing and that God necessarily exists.⁷⁶ These two ideas became the first principles of his philosophy that he thought put scientific reasoning on an indubitable foundation.

Jeffrey Stout proposed that Descartes' thinking about the difference between probability and demonstration reflected Aristotle's distinction between *scientia* and *opinio*. *Scientia* involves demonstration which is "that mode of reasoning which displays necessary connections between a proposition and its principles, as when a geometrical proposition is deduced from or reduced to the first principles of geometrical science."⁷⁷ *Opinio*, on the other hand, can only be more or less probable and relies on authority.⁷⁸ An opinion accepted on the basis of authority "suggests *approbation* with regard to the proposition accepted and *probity* with regard to the authorities who accept it."⁷⁹ Stout avers, from an historical point of view, that "[i]t was *reasonable* for Descartes, in a way that it could not be for us, to view the category of probable opinion with the gravest kind of suspicion and to turn instead to the quest for certainty."⁸⁰

A problem with Descartes' reliance on deductive reasoning arises, however, if all the particulars of the world and the created order cannot be deduced by logical "necessity" from first principles. Seigel suggests that, prior to Descartes' *Discourse* and *Meditations*, he was finding it

⁷⁵ Descartes, *Discourse*, 5.

⁷⁶ Descartes, *Meditations*, 31.

⁷⁷ Stout, *Flight from Authority*, 38.

⁷⁸ Stout, *Flight from Authority*, 38.

⁷⁹ Stout, *Flight from Authority*, 38, emphasis original.

⁸⁰ Stout, *Flight from Authority*, 50, emphasis original.

difficult to account for all the particulars of nature by deduction “in one fell swoop.”⁸¹ Descartes himself recognized this problem such that even in his quest for certainty, he conceded that observation and experiment would become necessary at some point.⁸² Observation and experiment, however, are not going the way of deduction. If it turns out that all the particulars one finds in the world cannot be deduced with logical necessity from first principles, then there must either be a radical reduction in what could be taken as knowledge on Descartes’ terms (since only demonstration and deduction involve indubitable certainty), or the particulars one finds in the world must be taken on the basis of probability. If particulars must be taken on the basis of probability, then Descartes’ system becomes inconsistent because it cannot account for the existence of particulars based on deductive reasoning alone. If probability is rejected, then a radical reduction would seem to be inevitable since the probable constitutes a large part of reality that human beings otherwise experience as an integral and undeniable part of existence. Descartes’ need for logical demonstration in his quest for certainty leads inherently, therefore, to the problem of reductionism. Reductionism is the phenomenon of thought that reduces all things to only one factor or category to the exclusion of any consideration, experience, or phenomenon that does not result logically from that factor or fit within that category. Reductionism is an inherent characteristic of modern idealism as a result of Descartes’ quest for certainty.

This tension between demonstration and probability directly impacts theology because all of God’s particular actions in the created order and in history as attested to in Scripture relating to the Gospel and God’s Lordship over creation are just that, particular actions in the created order and in history. As such, they are contingent, not necessary, from the standpoint of

⁸¹ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 68.

⁸² Descartes, *Discourse*, 36.

deductive thought precisely because they consist of events in history and are actions in physical reality. God's actions in physical reality land, therefore, in the area of probability from the standpoint of deductive reasoning. As events and actions that land in the area of probability, God's actions in physical reality cannot be accounted for on the basis of logical deduction from first principles in a deductive system of thought. It should be concluded, therefore, that modern idealism can be no aid to Christian theology since Christian theology is rooted in particular acts of God in the created order and in history.

Yet, modern theologians have persistently treated God's actions in history and physical reality either as not having occurred, based on a prior commitment to some universal explanation provided by the natural sciences, or as being of no use to theology due to the fact-value split. Conservative theology is not immune to this. Carl Henry, for example, viewed all of God's actions in history as deducible from axioms and first principles in a deductive system of thought like geometry. His doing so creates the problem for conservative theology that is present in liberal theology, that is, of not being able to account for God's actions in history, since logical deduction cannot account for them. This problem has arisen in modern philosophical and theological thought, however, as a result of Descartes' quest for certainty. Henry's theology assumes the skepticism and requirements of Descartes' thought, as will be shown below in chapter seven.

Along with finding certainty in deductive reasoning, Descartes intended that his quest for certainty be universal in scope. He was not only interested in demonstrating the existence of God and the human soul. He also wanted to provide "a method for solving all sorts of problems in the sciences."⁸³ He was trying to find a foundation for knowledge that would pertain to any

⁸³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 2.

discipline or area of thought. He was seeking universal explication where everything could be accounted for under one theory or methodology, like a unified theory in the natural sciences.⁸⁴

Lee Smolin explains the quest for a unified theory in the natural sciences—like that which was operating in Descartes—when he states that

[t]he mind calls out for a third theory to unify all physics, and for a simple reason. Nature is in an obvious sense ‘unified.’ The universe we find ourselves in is interconnected, in that everything interacts with everything else. There is no way we can have two theories of nature covering different phenomena, as if one had nothing to do with the other. Any claim for a final theory must be a complete theory of nature. It must encompass all we know.⁸⁵

That such a view is Cartesian is explained by Smith, who states that

[a] truly *universal* principle of method has ... been conclusively established—the principle, ... that the ‘simple natures’ being what they are, all effects, in animate no less than in inanimate nature, must allow of being explained in terms of configuration and motion, that is to say, in terms of the laws of motion, as formulated in universal physics. ... Nature is uniform with itself throughout; it is as sheerly physical in its ‘higher’ as in its ‘lower’ manifestations. We need postulate no additional force or entity, no vegetative or animal soul, no supervening vital principle. Descartes is indeed willing to allow, and he himself employs, the term ‘life’, but only as signifying a configuration of purely physical factors.⁸⁶

Therefore, Descartes will use a concept of “God” to support the universal principle. His concept of “God” will also serve as a principle in the deductive system of thought. However, God will have very little immediate connection to nature, as will be shown. Deism or materialism are the inevitable result, since the only thing Descartes needs God for is to establish the laws of nature.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 64.

⁸⁵ Lee Smolin, *The Trouble with Physics: The Rise of String Theory, the Fall of Science, and What Comes Next* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 4–5.

⁸⁶ Smith, *New Studies in Descartes*, 126.

⁸⁷ Descartes, *Discourse*, 13. Descartes, *Meditations*, 40, states that “I see plainly that the certainty and truth of every science depends exclusively upon the knowledge of the true God, to the extent that, prior to my becoming aware of him, I was incapable of achieving perfect knowledge about anything else. But now it is possible for me to achieve full and certain knowledge about countless things, both about God and other intellectual matters, as well as about the entirety of that corporeal nature which is the object of pure mathematics.”

The quest for universal explanation also leads to public theology and requires that there be no discontinuity between religion and science and between society and its institutions and the church. Descartes was trying to base *all* knowledge on an entirely new footing. The principles of the sciences must all be derived from philosophy.⁸⁸ His philosophy would provide the indubitable foundations from which to pursue knowledge in any field. In the Cartesian scheme as bequeathed to the modern world, theology and the church must answer to philosophy, culture, and the authorities of *wissenschaft* as a matter of pre-determined principle. The “old” must justify itself to the young and the new or be set aside.

Universal Reason

Descartes thought that only pure reason could provide both the indubitably certain knowledge he sought and be universal in scope. He regarded reason as “a universal instrument that can be of help in all sorts of circumstances.”⁸⁹ Thus, he intended to proceed “on the basis of reason alone.”⁹⁰ Richard Bernstein explains that for Descartes “there should be no appeal other than the appeal to reason itself. We must be skeptical about any claims to knowledge that are based solely on the testimony of the senses, former opinions, prejudices, tradition, or any authority other than reason.”⁹¹ Descartes put it like this:

I have always thought that two issues—namely, God and the soul—are chief among those that ought to be demonstrated with the aid of philosophy rather than theology. For although it suffices for us believers to believe by faith that the human soul does not die with the body, and that God exists, certainly no unbelievers seem capable of being persuaded . . . until these two are first proven to them by natural reason.”⁹²

⁸⁸ Descartes, *Meditations*, 2.

⁸⁹ Descartes, *Discourse*, 32.

⁹⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 56.

⁹¹ Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 117.

⁹² Descartes, *Meditations*, 1.

Descartes combines a quest for certainty based on reason alone with a quest for demonstrating the existence of God based on reason alone.

In addition, Descartes resolved to look for no knowledge other than what could be found within himself, “or else in the great book of the world.”⁹³ He was “hoping that those who use only their natural reason in all its purity [would] judge [his] opinions better than those who believe only in old books.”⁹⁴ Descartes conceived of reason as radically free from authority and the constraints of tradition. Seigel explains that Descartes viewed reason, “as most pure and solid when it was free of corruption by the world’s confusions.”⁹⁵ Thus, Descartes’ view of reason “implied nothing less than the attempt to break free of all social and cultural experience.”⁹⁶ It also constituted a rejection of the medieval concept of authority.⁹⁷

Descartes’ concept of reason also functioned as radical judge of the senses. Descartes asserted that “whether awake or asleep, we should never allow ourselves to be persuaded except by the evidence of our reason. And it is to be observed that I say ‘of our reason,’ and not ‘of our imagination’ or ‘of our senses.’”⁹⁸ Seigel explains that the bodily senses provided for Descartes “only the raw material of knowledge, indeterminate data that needed to be passed through the filter of reflective judgment in order to provide purified elements with which to build structures

⁹³ Descartes, *Discourse*, 5.

⁹⁴ Descartes, *Discourse*, 43.

⁹⁵ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 62.

⁹⁶ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 62.

⁹⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 5, where he refers to the “overwhelmingly bookish or clerkly character of medieval culture. When we speak of the Middle Ages as the ages of authority we are usually thinking about the authority of the Church. But they were the age not only of her authority, but of authorities. If their culture is regarded as a response to the environment, then the elements in that environment to which it responded most vigorously were manuscripts. Every writer, if he possibly can, bases himself on an earlier writer, follows an *auctour*: preferably a Latin one.”

⁹⁸ Descartes, *Discourse*, 22.

of rational certainty.”⁹⁹ Reflective judgment would become judge and jury. Knowledge must be based on pure reason where the mind is completely withdrawn from the senses.¹⁰⁰

In contrast to prior thought, Descartes’ view was antithetical to Thomas Aquinas’ thinking when it comes to the role of the senses in obtaining knowledge. Aquinas held that “it is natural to man to attain to intellectual truths through sensible objects, because all our knowledge originates from sense.”¹⁰¹ It is evident, therefore, that Descartes’ epistemology constituted a clear rejection of the medieval way of knowing because he doubted that reliable knowledge could come through the senses.

Reason, Innate Ideas, and the Light of Nature

Descartes wanted to use reason alone to establish indubitably certain knowledge. So what did Descartes mean by reason? He did not necessarily provide a definition of it, but we can piece some things together. It is “natural reason.”¹⁰² It is a faculty that is natural to human beings and excludes any “supernatural” assistance, as Descartes’ asserts that “everything that can be known about God can be shown by reasons drawn exclusively from our own mind.”¹⁰³ Reason is also a faculty that only humans have as opposed to animals.¹⁰⁴ Reason is also essentially logical reasoning and deduction akin to pure mathematics, as we have seen. It is supposed to be “pure,” that is, free of any input from external authority, which he regards as prejudice, and from the

⁹⁹ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 74,

¹⁰⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 6.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. I, Latin–English ed., Prima Pars, Question 1, Article 9, (Scotts Valley, CA: NovAntiqua, 2008), 14. The Latin of the text cited in English is as follows: “Est autem naturale homini ut per sensibilia ad intelligibilia veniat, quia omni nostra cognitio a sensu initium habet.”

¹⁰² Descartes, *Discourse*, 43.

¹⁰³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Descartes, *Discourse*, 32, where he states that “this attests not merely to the fact that beasts have less reason than men but that they have none at all.”

senses.¹⁰⁵ Kant did something similar when he conceived of formulating principles of pure reason without any admixture of anything empirical. Descartes does not appear to be consistent on this point as he affirms reasoning from effect to cause, which, in turn, involves an element of observation and experiment.¹⁰⁶

Descartes' concept of reason becomes more interesting—and more problematic—when we consider the origin of the clear and distinct ideas on which he relies. The issue is whether those ideas are really proved or are innate, that is, whether they are just ideas that he has. Descartes indicates that clear and distinct ideas are innate. He says, for example, that “I have tried to find in general the principles or first causes of all that is or can be in the world, without considering anything but God alone, who created the world, and without deriving these principles from any other source but from certain seeds of truths *that are naturally in our souls*.”¹⁰⁷ It seems that these “seeds of truths” relate to what Descartes referred to as “the light of nature.” This “light of nature” is part of reason. It is powerful because it shows only that which must be true and cannot be in anyway doubtful.¹⁰⁸

Accordingly, consideration of what Descartes meant by reason must also include what he said about this “light of nature,” because Descartes strove to establish the principles of first philosophy based “on speculative truths known exclusively by means of the light of nature.”¹⁰⁹ These speculative truths were essential to his being able to assert his arguments for the existence of the soul, the existence of God, and the existence of the external world. Thus, the light of

¹⁰⁵ Descartes, *Meditations*, 6, 8.

¹⁰⁶ Descartes, *Discourse*, 35, 36, 43.

¹⁰⁷ Descartes, *Discourse*, 36, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ Descartes, *Meditations*, 21.

¹⁰⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 5, 8.

nature taught Descartes that “from the fact that I doubt, it follows that I am.”¹¹⁰ Moreover, the “light of nature” teaches that “there must be at least as much [reality] in the efficient and total cause as there is in the effect of the same cause,”¹¹¹ and that “there is more reality in an infinite substance than there is in a finite one.”¹¹² These “speculative truths” were essential to his proof for the existence of God.¹¹³ In addition, the light of nature purportedly taught Descartes that if ideas represent “non-things,” then ideas proceed from nothing.¹¹⁴ In other words, everything must come from something, according to the light of nature. He uses this principle to explain how he can have the ideas of substance, duration, and number about external objects on the grounds that he borrowed these ideas from ideas he has about himself as a substance. The idea given to him by the light of nature about himself enabled him to posit a basis for actual knowledge of external objects. He will also use this principle in his argument for the existence of God. In addition, the light of nature enabled Descartes to consider that the same force and action are needed to create things originally and to sustain them.¹¹⁵ This principle enabled Descartes to assert that “I myself, who now exist, will also exist a littler later on,”¹¹⁶ assuring his ability to construe himself as a substance. Moreover, the light of nature also taught Descartes that God could not be a deceiver because it teaches that “all fraud and deception depend on some defect.”¹¹⁷ Being able to show that God is not a deceiver will be critical for Descartes in overcoming skepticism regarding

¹¹⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 21.

¹¹¹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 22.

¹¹² Descartes, *Meditations*, 25.

¹¹³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 23, 26-29.

¹¹⁴ Descartes, *Meditations*, 24.

¹¹⁵ Descartes, *Meditations*, 27.

¹¹⁶ Descartes, *Meditations*, 27.

¹¹⁷ Descartes, *Meditations*, 29.

knowledge of the external world, once he has “proved” God’s existence. This principle, however, seems to be more of a moral concept than a logical one.

This survey of Descartes’ concept of “the light of nature” is important because Descartes did not “prove” anything without it. The question arises, therefore, as to where the light of nature came from. This is a huge problem for him because he relies on the light of nature to prove the *cogito* and God’s existence. But if he proves these things on the basis of principles that are inherent, that is, assumed not proved, then his system ceased to be the rationalism it purported to be and was fundamentally inconsistent. Inconsistency is fatal to rationalism. Inconsistency arises because if Descartes just assumes the light of nature, then the *cogito* and God are “proved” on the basis of principles that just are or are just *believed* to be. This grounds his system in some sort of faith not reason. Furthermore, if the light of nature is used to prove the *cogito* and God’s existence, then the light of nature must exist prior to the *cogito* and God. If the light of nature exists prior to the *cogito*, then the *cogito* is not the bedrock of knowledge that Descartes argued it was. Descartes knew something prior to the *cogito* for which he did not rationally account and which he did not doubt away in his skepticism. Similarly, if he used the light of nature to prove God’s existence, then it had to exist prior to and independently of God. But this is impossible for Descartes, because nothing could exist independently of God, since, once God’s existence was proved, God had to be the first cause of everything. Thus, Descartes’ concept of the light of nature brings fundamental inconsistencies into his thought.

A further inconsistency arises if concepts involved in the “light of nature” are things that Descartes would have learned from the philosophical tradition of the middle ages. This would be inconsistent because Descartes claimed to reject all prior tradition in his quest for certainty. The concepts of substance and causation in the light of nature were principles in the philosophy of the

Middle Ages and, it can be argued, arose from sense perception of the world and the continued existence of objects as observed by the senses and reason; at least that is what Aquinas thought. In using such concepts, however, Descartes did not reject everything he had learned from his Aristotelean upbringing, and key principles in the light of nature were not innate for him but learned.¹¹⁸ All of this has the result of Descartes using the light of nature indispensably—he did not prove anything without it—without being able to rationally account for where it came from.

These inconsistencies in his concept of reason are troubling. They lead to fideism and the will being central in his quest for certainty. This result brings the centrality of the will into the modern outlook.

Fideism and the Will to Certainty

Because Descartes regarded aspects of the light of nature to be intrinsic or inherent in human reason, Descartes relied implicitly on principles and reasoning abilities that were not proved but assumed. This implies that his first principles of philosophy were just chosen or posited. For example, he used a concept of substance that the light of nature provided to think of himself as a substance, but he did not prove the concept of a substance. The concept of substance, however, was vitally important to his arguments related to the *cogito*. It appears, therefore, that his appeals to the light of nature render his idealism to be a form of fideism, where first principles are not proved but merely posited. This consideration suggests that modern philosophy takes the form of positing where the philosopher is one who asserts and posits theory, not one who explicates phenomena that already exist. Such a model of the philosopher is rooted

¹¹⁸ Russell, *History*, 567, questions whether Descartes really doubted everything from tradition because he did not doubt some scholastic maxims, such as, that “an effect can never have more perfection than its cause” and the notion of substance. It might be that Descartes would respond by saying that he was not assuming such things from “tradition,” but from “the light of nature.” Even then, however, his assuming those things would constitute assumptions that he did not prove.

in Descartes' epistemology, and it provides no account for how such positing can be called into question by reason or empirical fact. This ties into the problem of the subjectivism of modern idealism where the world is answerable to the constructs of thought and not the other way around.

The prospect of fideism raises an important consideration of how the human will fits into Descartes' quest for certainty, which may also account for the place of the will in American Evangelicalism. Indeed, Descartes' account of the will suggests that he became certain of the clear and distinct ideas of the soul and of God as an assertion of the will. James Edwards contends that Friedrich Nietzsche reached such a conclusion about Descartes' thought. Edwards explains that truth according to Descartes is nothing but accurate representation with respect to ideas in the mind, and that "representation is rooted in the spontaneous reflection of what confronts [the mind]."¹¹⁹ He then goes on to explain that Nietzsche insisted

that this standard rationalist imagery is profoundly misleading, as it obscures the fundamental place of *will* as the center of the Cartesian ego-subject. Even in Descartes's own account, the ego cannot be merely a passive mirror of impressions and ideas: as a thinking thing it must either assent to or dissent from its spontaneous representations of the world.... Thus the ego, whose theoretical and practical salvation depends upon the acquisition of accurate and comprehensive knowledge, must pick and choose (on some epistemic principle) from the various representations that beset it.¹²⁰

This seems to suggest that knowledge consists of choosing among propositions, which is not a function of the intellect but of the will. Nietzsche's conclusion can consistently be drawn from Descartes' own account, for Descartes stated

that willing is merely a matter of being able to do or not do the same thing, that is, of being able to affirm or deny, to pursue or to shun; or better still, the will consists solely in the fact that when something is proposed to us by our intellect either to

¹¹⁹ James C. Edwards, *The Plain Sense of Things: The Fate of Religion in an Age of Normal Nihilism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 32.

¹²⁰ Edwards, *Plain Sense of Things*, 32, emphasis original.

affirm or deny, to pursue or to shun, we are moved in such a way that we sense that we are determined to it by no external force.¹²¹

Accordingly, the will chooses to affirm or deny what is proposed by the intellect in order to be free. Descartes regards will as “free choice” and claims to experience it as “limited by no boundaries whatever.”¹²² The will is the human faculty that makes judgements and determinations.¹²³ So, for example, Descartes contends that he arrived at the *cogito* “because a great light in [his] intellect gave way to a great inclination in [his] will.”¹²⁴

Descartes sounds contemporary with his conception of the will as free choice. To be fair to Descartes, he did describe the will as being informed by the intellect. He contended that “it is manifest by the light of nature that a perception on the part of the intellect must always precede a determination on the part of the will.”¹²⁵ He also stated that “our will tends not to pursue or flee anything unless our understanding represents it to the will as either good or bad.”¹²⁶

These considerations, however, suggest that there was an inconsistency in Descartes’ understanding of the will. If the will acts only on the basis of things presented to it by the intellect, then it would seem that the will is subject to and determined by the intellect and, therefore, not free. If, on the other hand, the will chooses among things that are presented to the intellect, then the will would be the faculty that is in charge and free. If the will is free, then knowledge would result from choice and not from rational principle. Choice then, that is, the exertion of the will, would give certainty to knowledge. This would contradict, however,

¹²¹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 32.

¹²² Descartes, *Meditations*, 31.

¹²³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 33.

¹²⁴ Descartes, *Meditations*, 33.

¹²⁵ Descartes, *Meditations*, 33.

¹²⁶ Descartes, *Discourse*, 16.

Descartes' quest for finding certainty by reason alone. No matter how rational Descartes purports to be, therefore, there seems to be a strong element of existentialism in his thought, or the seeds of it, as a result of his treatment of the will.

In whatever way this tension in Descartes' thought is resolved—if it can be resolved, it is significant to note the powerful things Descartes said about the human will. He tied the image of God in human beings to the will, not reason.¹²⁷ He coordinated God's will and the human will by asserting that “when viewed in itself formally and precisely, God's faculty of willing does not appear to be any greater [than one's own].”¹²⁸ Such ideas would seem to provide a foundation and inspiration for the egotism of the modern outlook which endures to the present. There does not seem to be any room in Descartes' theory of knowledge for the will to be passively moved by *external* factors in affirming anything to be true. Affirmation arises from within in the freedom of the will. Does American Evangelicalism operate on the same principle?

¹²⁷ Descartes, *Meditations*, 32, where he said that the will is the “chief basis for ... understanding that I bear a certain image and likeness of God.”

¹²⁸ Descartes, *Meditations*, 32.

CHAPTER THREE

DESCARTES' ARGUMENTS FOR THE *COGITO* AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Having discussed modern idealism in general terms and Kant's contribution to it, as well as Descartes' quest, I now turn to the specific features of Descartes' thought that gave rise to the fact-value split and the issues of public theology, subjectivism, and secularism in theology. These features include (1) Descartes' reasoning behind the *cogito* as the bedrock of knowledge, (2) his arguments for the existence of his concept of "God," (3) his treatment of sense perception, and (4) his treatment of the so-called mind-body problem. His reasoning behind the *cogito* and his arguments for the existence of God will be treated in this chapter. His treatment of sense perception and the mind-body problem will be treated in chapter four.

Descartes' Reasoning behind the *Cogito* As the Bedrock of Knowledge

As discussed above, Descartes sought an unassailable bedrock of clear and distinct ideas upon which to build a basis for scientific knowledge of the world. He thought he found this bedrock in two ideas. The first idea is that he himself exists as a thinking thing. This is the *cogito*: I think; therefore, I am or exist. The second idea is that God necessarily exists, with the arguments for the existence of God being based on the *cogito*.¹ He argued that of all the things the human mind could know, these two ideas "are the most certain and the most evident."² As such, these two ideas were supposed to become the first principles of his philosophy. Accordingly, reaching the *cogito* was the first goal of Descartes' thinking. He asserted that the *cogito* was "so firm and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were

¹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 31.

² Descartes, *Meditations*, 9.

incapable of shaking it.”³ The existence of the ego as a thinking thing was the one thing Descartes thought he could be sure of in the face of all doubt.

Therefore, we turn to examining how he arrived at the *cogito* and developed his argument for the necessary existence of God out of it. In doing so we will bump into his concept of “idea” and the representative theory of perception (RTP), two constructs in Descartes’ thought that are central to modern idealism. The establishment of the *cogito* will also lead to the mind-body problem, which in turn leads to deism and the fact-value split.

The term “*cogito*” is short for the phrase: “I think; therefore I am or exist,”⁴ *cogito ergo sum* in Latin. The word *cogito* in Latin is translated into English as “I think.” The word *ergo* is translated as “therefore.” The word *sum* in Latin is translated as I am, which means exist in the context of Descartes’ thought.

Skepticism As the First Step in the Argument

In trying to defeat the arguments of the skeptic by reaching the *cogito*, Descartes first assumed a thoroughgoing skepticism. He thought that if he doubted all things but then found one thing that he could not doubt, he had found the one thing that is certain beyond all doubt. The way to defeat the skeptic is to play the skeptic’s game. If in playing the skeptic’s game, one found one thing that skepticism could not displace, then one had found the bedrock of knowledge. The first step in Descartes’ method, therefore, was to engage in systematic doubt. Accordingly, he subjected tradition, authority, mathematics, God, and nature (meaning sense perception) to a rigorous skepticism. He would then re-construct knowledge in a manner consistent with his reasoning. Descartes claimed, however, that he was not imitating the skeptics,

³ Descartes, *Discourse*, 18.

⁴ Descartes, *Discourse*, 18.

for they “doubt merely for the sake of doubting and put on the affectation of being perpetually undecided.”⁵ Rather, he claimed that his strategy was “to cast aside the shifting earth and sand in order to find rock or clay.”⁶ Skepticism, therefore, had utility for Descartes in freeing the mind from all prejudices and in withdrawing the mind from the senses.⁷ He thought that he could only arrive at clear and distinct ideas by doing both.

Consequently, since Descartes started with skepticism to sweep the mind clean of doubtful opinions, skepticism became the *first* premise and a fundamental presupposition of modern thought. Anthony Kenny explains that “Descartes profoundly influenced later philosophy ... by his insistence that the *first* task for the philosopher is to rid oneself of all prejudice by calling in doubt all that can be doubted.”⁸ Rorty explains that “Cartesian (as opposed to Pyrrhonian ‘practical’) skepticism seems to us so much a part of what it is to ‘think philosophically’ that we are amazed that Plato and Aristotle never confronted it directly.”⁹

An unfortunate result of Descartes’ removal of all prior knowledge through skepticism was that it created a bias or presupposition in his methodology and modern idealism against any claim to knowledge that could come from tradition and authority. This presupposed skepticism also rendered suspect claims to knowledge that could come through sense perception. Only that knowledge which his methodology could establish would be regarded as legitimate. Descartes’ methodology, therefore, automatically casts doubt on any action of God in physical reality as a

⁵ Descartes, *Discourse*, 16.

⁶ Descartes, *Discourse*, 16.

⁷ Descartes, *Meditations*, 6, where he describes the utility of skepticism as freeing of the mind “of all prejudices, in preparing the easiest way ... to withdraw the mind from the senses, and finally, in making it impossible ... to doubt any further those things that we later discover to be true.”

⁸ Anthony Kenny, “Descartes to Kant,” in *The Oxford History of Western Philosophy*, Anthony Kenny, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 114, emphasis added.

⁹ Rorty, *Mirror of Nature*, 46.

basis for theological claims that could be witnessed by or come into the mind through sense perception. As a result, Descartes' methodology leaves modern theology unable to account for knowledge arising from an operation on the human mind from the outside by means of any speech, by any divine action in physical reality, and by any ceremony or ritual in the Christian community. Descartes' methodology also renders it impossible for a theologian or Christian to accept the Bible as true and authoritative in what it says.

Descartes accomplished his systematic doubting by applying a particular burden of proof. He determined that he would put "aside everything that admits the *least* doubt, as if [discovering] it to be *completely* false."¹⁰ If there could be 1% doubt about something one thinks one knows, then it should be regarded as 100% false. John Searle points out that this is the burden of proof skeptics use: "The skeptic's argument is always the same: [one] could have all possible evidence, and still be mistaken.... And if [one] could be mistaken in this case, why not in every case?"¹¹ Thus, if the senses deceive just once, then they should be completely rejected as a reliable source of knowledge.¹² Seigel explains it well when he states that Descartes had a "penchant to make knowledge a matter of all or nothing."¹³ He did that to conceive of knowledge as grounded in pure deductive reasoning.¹⁴

The skeptical standard is a staggering burden of proof. It is even more stringent than the standard of "proof beyond a reasonable doubt" used in American criminal trials. It is consistent with maintaining that sure and certain knowledge consists of demonstration based on deductive

¹⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 13, emphasis added.

¹¹ John R. Searle, *Mind: A Brief Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 274.

¹² Descartes, *Meditations*, 10, where he asserts that the senses sometimes deceive us and that "it is a mark of prudence never to place our complete trust in those who have deceived us even once."

¹³ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 74.

¹⁴ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 74.

reasoning, not probability, since to say that something is only 99% certain is to speak in terms of probability not demonstration. This burden of proof has a huge implication in that it limits the field as to what could be regarded as knowledge and meaningful and sweeps aside a great many things that humans otherwise take as real knowledge that are critical to the joy and functioning of human life, such as, the smell of roast beef baking in the oven, or watching one's favorite baseball player hit a home run to the win the game in the bottom of the ninth, or receiving Christ's atoning sacrifice and the forgiveness of sins through His body and blood given through His speech act in the tangible qualities of bread and wine. Descartes' skepticism drastically reduced what could count as knowledge and meaningful and established reductionism as a characteristic tendency and problem for modern thought.

Descartes' burden of proof has another serious implication. If it turns out that Descartes really did not establish the *cogito* and the existence of God as clearly and distinctly as he thought he did, then there was no way for him to defeat skepticism and restore the possibility of knowledge of himself and of the world. If there was any flaw in his reasoning for the *cogito*, then he did not find one thing certain as bedrock that was beyond the reach of skepticism. And if he did not establish the *cogito* with certainty, then he had no basis for his argument for the existence of God. If he did not prove the existence of God, then he did not provide a way to have any knowledge of the world, because he needed God to be able to establish any knowledge of the world. Having swept away traditional claims for knowledge of the world in his systematic doubting, Descartes had no way of bringing knowledge of the world back into view if his arguments for the *cogito* were not sound.

Descartes' skepticism toward sense perception became central to modern idealism and the modern outlook. By "senses" Descartes meant the external senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste,

and touch and “internal” senses such as physical pain and thirst. His analysis applied mostly to the sense of sight. He applied skepticism to sense perception by applying his burden of proof to the sense of sight by taking note of “optical illusions.” For example, he referred to towers that seem round from a distance but appear square up close.¹⁵ He referred to large statues that are mounted on pedestals that do not seem so large when looking at them at a distance.¹⁶ Subsequent to Descartes, philosophers adduced other “optical illusions” to argue against the reliability of sense perception. Famous examples include a stick that looks bent when dipped into the water—when we otherwise know that the stick is not bent—and the same figurine that could look like either the head of a rabbit or the head of a duck. Another example is seeing a mirage of an oasis in the desert.

Applying the skeptical burden of proof led Descartes to this conclusion: If the sense of sight can be deceived by an optical illusion in one instance, then sense perception should be regarded as unreliable in *every* instance. If the stick looks bent when dipped in water when we “know” that the stick is not really bent, then the sense of sight is deceiving us. If it is deceiving us in this instance, then it cannot be regarded as reliable *at all*. This reasoning is then extrapolated to apply to all the senses. But then the question arises: What then do we see when we see something? The answer will be that we see a representation of things in the mind, but not the things themselves. In this way Descartes’ systematic doubting of sense perception led to the RTP.

Descartes doubted the reliability of the internal senses in the same way. He cited the example of amputees who still “sense pain in the very limb they had lost.”¹⁷ If they sense pain in

¹⁵ Descartes, *Meditations*, 43.

¹⁶ Descartes, *Meditations*, 43.

¹⁷ Descartes, *Meditations*, 43.

a limb that is not there, then they are being deceived. If this deception happens in one instance, then, according to the burden of proof, it can be posited that it happens in every instance. And then again, the only thing really sensed is a representation of something.

Carrying systematic doubt still further, Descartes doubted the existence of his own body. He did this on the basis of dreams. He mused, for example, that it was certain that he was dressed in his winter dressing gown, holding a sheet of paper in his hand, and sitting next to a fire.¹⁸ But what if he was dreaming these things? One could dream that one is dressed in a certain way, doing something in particular, while sitting next to a fire. If it is possible to dream such things about one's body, then Descartes reasoned, using the burden of proof, that he could not be sure whether his body was there or not. If he was mistaken about his body's existence in one instance, for example, while dreaming, then he could not be sure of his body's existence at all, since knowledge must be certain, beyond all doubt. If what I thought I knew is false in one instance, then it is completely false; I cannot be certain of knowing anything.

When Descartes doubted the existence of his body on the basis of dreams he was doing so on the basis of a big assumption. He was assuming that "there are no definitive signs by which to distinguish being awake from being asleep."¹⁹ We will examine the legitimacy of this assumption in the section involving Austin's and Searle's arguments against the RTP below. For now, it is merely to note that Descartes used the phenomenon of dreaming as an argument for being skeptical about the existence of his own body.

Having doubted the senses and the existence of his own body, Descartes mused that he

¹⁸ Descartes, *Meditations*, 10.

¹⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 10. It is significant to note that Descartes could not make this argument if he did not already know the difference between being awake and dreaming. One could not recognize a dream as a dream unless one knew the difference between being awake and dreaming. He has to assume knowing the difference to even be able to talk about dreaming. But then he conveniently discards knowing the difference to be able to make his skeptical argument.

most certainly could be sure of God's existence and the truths of arithmetic. Certainly, he could always be sure that 2 plus 3 equals 5, even in his dreams, couldn't he?²⁰ But what if God were an evil genius that deceives us when we add 2 and 3? In that event, one could not even believe the principles of mathematics and geometry to be certain.²¹ In addition, what one had previously thought God to be like could also be doubted, leading, therefore, to doubting the existence of God.

Thus, Descartes doubted that tradition and authority provided reliable knowledge. He doubted external and internal sense perception. He even found a way to doubt the truths of mathematics and the existence of God. Having, therefore, applied systematic doubt to every opinion or source of knowledge he had previously relied upon, he thought he had cleared the way to finding that one clear and distinct idea that is beyond all doubt. The clear and distinct idea of his own existence, that is, the *cogito*, comes into view.

The *Cogito* Comes into View

The *cogito* as the bedrock of knowledge comes into view because even if Descartes were deceived by tradition, authority, the senses, and even by God as an evil demon, he could not doubt that he exists as a thinking thing. A thing that is being deceived and doubting must certainly exist. He put it like this: “[W]hile I wanted thus to think that everything was false, it necessarily had to be the case that I, who was thinking this, was something.”²² It does not matter that he could be deceived by anything; the fact that he is being deceived assures him that there is an “I” that necessarily exists precisely because it is being deceived.²³ A thing that is doubting

²⁰ Descartes, *Discourse*, 18.

²¹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 11–12.

²² Descartes, *Discourse*, 18.

²³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 13, where he says that “there is no doubt that I exist, if [God] is deceiving me.”

must necessarily exist precisely because it is doubting. The truth of whatever he is thinking about does not come into it. Being deceived and doubting themselves prove the existence of the thing that is being deceived and doubting. Seigel points out that the conclusion for Descartes is simple and straightforward: “The doubter exists, then.”²⁴ This conclusion must be beyond all doubt because it remains after having doubted away every other source of and claim to knowledge. The one thing Descartes can claim to know for certain is the existence of his own ego. He regards this conclusion as necessary. He asserted that “after everything has been most carefully weighed, it must finally be established that this pronouncement ‘I am, I exist’ is *necessarily* true every time I utter it or *conceive* it in my mind.”²⁵ The ego becomes the bedrock of knowledge, the one fixed point of reference.

Descartes regarded the certainty of his own existence as clear and distinct. He asserted that “I manifestly know that nothing can be perceived more easily and more evidently than my own mind.”²⁶ With the use of the word “perceived,” Descartes appears to be asserting that he has an immediate perception of his own mind. This perception is quite different from perception of external objects.²⁷ The perception of external objects is confused, he claims.²⁸ The perception of his own mind is clear and distinct.

²⁴ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 57.

²⁵ Descartes, *Meditations*, 13, emphasis added.

²⁶ Descartes, *Meditations*, 19. Similarly, Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 141–42, states: “We are conscious *a priori* of the complete identity of the self in respect of all representations which can ever belong to our knowledge, as being a necessary condition of the possibility of all representations. For in me they can represent something only in so far as they belong with all others to one consciousness.” This suggests that we must be conscious of being conscious before—as a prior condition to—any representation of an external object can be given in the mind. Whether this is true or not in fact is something to be questioned. But note the assertion that *the complete identity of the self* is the “necessary condition of the possibility of all representations.” The self becomes the possibility of knowledge.

²⁷ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 27.

²⁸ Descartes, *Meditations*, 45.

Having established the ego as the one thing Descartes thought he knew for certain existed, the next step in the argument was to conclude with certainty what this ego or self consists of. Descartes' conclusion was that it is a thinking thing. That is to say, it is a substance the essence of which is to think. Thus, it must first be determined that the "I" is a substance. It must then be determined that the essence of the "I" as this substance is to think.

We recall that the concept of substance was given to Descartes by the light of nature. It is something he assumes, not proves. Substances exist. If something exists, it must be a substance. Since the "I" exists, it must be a substance. Moreover, he assumes that a substance has attributes. This is an assumption carried over from Aristotelian thought. Furthermore, he contends that there are physical substances and intellectual substances. An essential attribute of an intellectual substance, a mind, is to think. Physical substances, that is, bodies do not think. Their essential attributes consist of extension in space, having parts, and being subject to decay and death. He concludes that he is a thinking thing, a substance the essence of which is to think, because this substance has the attributes of thinking, which includes doubting, understanding, affirming, denying, willing, refusing, imagining, sensing.²⁹ He thinks he is justified, therefore, in concluding that his essence consists entirely in being a thinking thing.³⁰ In other words, an intellectual substance cannot be a physical substance by definition.

Therefore, Descartes concludes that his essence as a human being is mind alone, where mind is understood as utterly distinct from and utterly void of anything physical. He reaches this conclusion because the only thing that he can be sure of is the ego, not his own body. The conclusion he reaches is that the essence of who he is as a human being cannot be in any way

²⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 15.

³⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 43–44.

physical.

Descartes' conclusion that the human being is only mind as a thinking thing is monumental. It leads to the so-called mind-body problem and all the bifurcations found in the modern outlook, including the fact-value split. It also leads to his conclusion that the essence of physical objects is perceived only by the mind. If the essence of physical objects can be apprehended only by the mind, not by the senses, then the thinking thing must be only pure intellect, without admixture of anything physical.

Descartes relies here, in part, on the distinction already made by Galileo in the interests of the new science regarding secondary qualities and the essence of things that was discussed above. He offers his own proof of this by means of a thought experiment by which he thinks that he can prove that the mind does not consist of anything physical, but only the intellect alone. Descartes' thought experiment involved observing melting wax.³¹ He observed how the "accidental" qualities of wax, which are perceived by the senses, change as wax melts. Such qualities are taste, color, smell, texture, hardness, softness, solidity, liquidity, and the like. Yet, the mind perceives that the wax is some substance that remains constant even as the "accidental" qualities perceived by the senses change.³² The essence of the wax, therefore, must not consist in those qualities. If the essence of wax does not consist in those qualities, then what the wax

³¹ The reader may immediately notice the word "observed" here. Observation here does mean observing with the senses. Thus, Descartes is engaging in an inconsistency. The only way he knows that the accidental qualities of the wax are changing is by observing the change with his senses. This observation is important because it allows the intellect to reach a conclusion about substances precisely because the accidental qualities are observed to change, while there is some "thing" that remains constant. Thus, Descartes relied on the reliability of the senses in order to turn around and make an argument against the reliability of the senses. He argued for the unreliability of the senses so he could conclude that the essence of things is perceived by the mind alone, with the result that the mind is pure intellect. His argument is not consistent, however, because he could not have made the argument on the basis of observing the melting wax if what he was observing with the senses was not accurate.

³² The senses also perceive that the wax is some thing that remains constant, but Descartes does not recognize that the mind perceives this through the senses.

“really is” is perceived by the mind alone.³³

Thus, Descartes concluded that sense perception does not give genuine knowledge of the world, as he states that “it does not appear that nature teaches us to conclude anything . . . from these sense perceptions unless the intellect has first conducted its own inquiry regarding things external to us. For it seems to belong exclusively to the mind, and not to the composite of mind and body, to know the truth in these matters.”³⁴ Thus, he concludes that since truth regarding external objects is apprehended by the mind alone, and not through the composite of mind and body, the ego, the thinking thing, must consist of mind alone, without any corporeal component at all. The crucial point of Descartes’ *cogito* takes shape at this point because “it produces the claim that all knowledge begins from the mind alone as its starting-point, a thinking substance that exists independently of any material conditions or bodily form.”³⁵

But what then is the ontological status of the accidental qualities of the wax? Do they exist in the wax as qualities of the wax, or do they exist only in the mind of the observer? It would seem that they would have to exist in the wax in order to be observed. When Descartes concludes that the essence of the wax consists only of those things that can be perceived by the intellect, however, he sloughs off the qualities of the wax into some ambiguous existence that becomes irrelevant to philosophical and scientific inquiry.

The clear and distinct idea of himself as a thinking thing has had enormous consequences. It led Descartes by inevitable and deterministic logic to his famous mind-body dualism, the

³³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 16–17. Descartes, *Meditations*, 17, goes on to state that the “perception of the wax is neither a seeing, nor a touching, nor an imagining. Nor has it ever been, even though it previously seemed so; rather it is an inspection on the part of the mind alone.” Descartes, *Meditations*, 18, goes on to say that “what I thought I had seen with my eyes, I actually grasped with the faculty of judgment, which is in my mind.”

³⁴ Descartes, *Meditations*, 46.

³⁵ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 57.

upshot of which was to create bifurcations that permeate all modern thought as basic assumptions. The essence of mind is to think. A thinking thing “doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and ... also imagines and senses.”³⁶ A body, however, has some shape, is enclosed in space, and can be set in motion.³⁷ Its essence is to be an extended thing. A body is divisible while mind is “utterly indivisible.”³⁸ Since the body is divisible, it can perish. Since the mind is not divisible, it cannot perish; the soul is immortal.³⁹ As a result, mind and body are utterly distinct from each other. In fact, Descartes regarded mind and body as “contraries” to each other.⁴⁰ He thought this was proved by logical deduction.

If mind and body are contraries, then the physical world and anything consisting of spirit cannot be in a causal relation with each other. God cannot act in the physical world as a basic assumption. Seigel contends that Descartes’ originality consisted of making the *cogito* “the foundation for a dualistic metaphysics, a view of the world that divided it unconditionally between spirit and matter.”⁴¹ This leads to secularism. It also leads to not being able to derive a value from a fact. If values do not exist in physical nature, then there must be a categorical separation between values and anything that could happen in the physical realm. The physical resurrection becomes not only inconceivable on scientific terms but simply irrelevant to theology because it could not lead to any value judgment or theology. Thus, the *cogito* and Descartes’

³⁶ Descartes, *Meditations*, 15.

³⁷ Descartes, *Meditation*, 14.

³⁸ Descartes, *Meditations*, 48.

³⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 44, where Descartes says, that “it is certain that I am really distinct from my body and can exist without it.”

⁴⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 7.

⁴¹ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 57. Comparisons have been made between Descartes and Augustine with respect to the *cogito*. Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 57, points out, for example, that Augustine also employed a version of the *cogito* to put an end to skepticism. Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 57, explains, however, that Descartes insisted that Augustine did not employ the *cogito* to argue that the self consists entirely of an immaterial substance in order to affirm the metaphysical dualism that Descartes formulated.

argumentation in support of it led to the mind-body problem and deism, the fact-value split, and many problems in Christian theology.

Given how devastating Descartes' reasoning for the ego is to a conception of humanity, the usefulness of sense perception, and Christian theology, it is important to consider whether there are any flaws in Descartes reasoning about the *cogito*. Jerrold Seigel and Anthony Kenny suggest that Descartes' reasoning was flawed. They question Descartes' consistency in establishing the *cogito*. Their criticism focuses on the "I" in the "I think" of the *cogito*. The issue is just what the referent of this "I" must be.

Kenny argues that in ordinary life Descartes used the "I" to talk about the concrete human being René Descartes. This human being had a concrete existence. He experienced development that involved both mind and body through natural growth and development, and through education, culture, and sense perception. Yet, the "I" of the *cogito* has to be an "I" that remains after doubting away everything that had made up the concrete human being. Kenny doubts, therefore, that Descartes should be "entitled to use the "I" in the *cogito* in reference to himself when he has already doubted away the concretely existing René Descartes in the first place, the Descartes that had experienced development and education.

In other words, the referent of the "I" in the *cogito* is not consistent. Descartes wants to use the "I" in the *cogito* to refer to himself, the concretely existing Descartes that underwent development and education in an historically existing culture. Yet, he also wants the "I" in the *cogito* to refer to some intellectual entity that does not consist of any influence from education, culture, and sense perception, and that does not consist of anything physical. The force of this criticism is that Descartes does not argue for an "I" in the *cogito* that refers to himself. Rather, he argues for an abstraction. The result is that the "I" in Descartes' *cogito* refers to two different

things, producing a fatal inconsistency. Kenny argues, therefore, that Descartes could have only consistently said that “there is thinking going on,” not that there is a definite “I” that is engaged in thinking.⁴²

Seigel’s critique is similar to Kenny’s. Seigel contends that as soon as Descartes makes the assertion, “I think; therefore I exist,” having doubted away every source of knowledge external to the absolute interiority of his own mind, he cut himself off “from the whole of his concrete existence.”⁴³ The subject of the *cogito* is an abstracted subject constructed by reason, “purified of all the actual, material qualities that seemed to define it until that moment.”⁴⁴ Yet, the Descartes that actually made the assertion was a concretely existing Descartes. The “I” cannot, therefore, refer to both and be consistent.

Seigel takes the argument a step further, however. He argues that the abstracted self or “reason” involved in the *cogito* is a non-entity, something that does not exist in reality. Such an abstracted self or “reason” could only exist in a human being if it had come “whole” from birth.⁴⁵ However, there really is no such “reason” in reality. Every human being has learned something from their culture or environment and has grown and developed. Every human being has a body and a brain. Yet, in order to find certainty, Descartes fashioned a concept of reason that was “most itself when it [constituted] itself wholly out of its own substance.”⁴⁶ Seigel explains aptly that Descartes’ concept of mind had to be “free of any material vehicle, of any bodily or social

⁴² Kenny, “Descartes to Kant,” 116.

⁴³ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 59.

⁴⁴ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 59.

⁴⁵ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 61. Descartes, *Meditations*, 28, states, curiously, “as to my parents, even if everything that I ever believed about them were true, still it is certainly not they who preserve me; nor is it they *who in any way brought me into being*, insofar as I am a thinking thing [emphasis added].” Where then does the mind come from?

⁴⁶ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 61.

need to grow and mature, and thus able to take possession of its powers without having to develop them through experience or interaction with others.”⁴⁷ Such a human mind, however, does not exist. There is no “I” that is a mind that comes into the world fully formed, not with respect to knowledge. The “I” to which the *cogito* refers, therefore, is not something real, and it is fatally ambiguous. As Seigel states it “resides in a limbo between its own multi-dimensional existence, embodied and formed by its relations to a particular time and place, and a one-dimensional being, a pure reflective subject.”⁴⁸

This ambiguity in the *cogito* has created a tension and a problem looking for a solution in modernity ever since, a solution that has been elusive. The modern ego wants to be free of all physical constraint in its own self-definition. Yet, pursuing such freedom results in cutting oneself off from one’s own roots, even one’s own body, and posits an “I” that in its positing cannot be part of human history and human community. Indeed, such pursuit of freedom posits an “I” that does not really exist; that is an illusion. These issues, which continue to be a problem today, find their roots in Descartes’ *cogito*.

Descartes’ Proof for the Existence of God

Since Descartes thought he had established the *cogito* as the one thing he could be certain he knows exists, the existence of the ego as a thinking thing became the first principle of modern philosophy. Based on the *cogito*, he then proceeded to try to prove the existence of God as the next thing of which he could be certain. He needs the existence of God to be able to establish the laws of nature and as a basis for having reliable knowledge of the world. His argument is based on there being a logically necessary connection between the *cogito* and God’s existence.

⁴⁷ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 61,

⁴⁸ Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 60.

Descartes describes the connection between the *cogito* and God's existence like this: "I have no choice but to conclude that the mere fact of my existing and of there being in me an idea of a most perfect being, that is God, demonstrates most evidently that God too exists."⁴⁹ He asserts further that he has ideas of things that are "hovering before [his] mind."⁵⁰ He states that "even now I do not deny that these ideas are in me."⁵¹ The idea of God is one of these ideas. It does not matter at this point whether the ideas are "true" or not; it just matters that he has them.⁵² A thinking thing has ideas. One of those ideas is the idea of "God." Thus, the thinking thing must exist prior to conceiving of God's existence.⁵³

There is much more to the argument, however. In order to move logically from having the idea of God to God's necessary existence, Descartes has to prove two things. First, he has to prove that the idea of God in his mind was caused by God. Second, he has to prove that the idea of God necessarily contains the perfection of existence. He will have to rely on the "light of nature" to "prove" these things. Moreover, to prove that the idea of God was caused by God, Descartes must use a concept of causation that he will assume and not prove. Like other concepts, Descartes got his concept of causation from the light of nature. This concept is that "there must be at least as much [reality] in the efficient and total cause as there is in the effect of

⁴⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 28.

⁵⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 19.

⁵¹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 19.

⁵² Descartes, *Meditations*, 19, where he says that "as far as ideas are concerned, if they are considered alone and in their own right, without being referred to something else, they cannot, properly speaking, be false. For whether it is a she-goat or a chimera that I am imagining, it is no less true that I imagine the one than the other." Descartes assumes here that "imagining" and sense perception have the same quality, but they actually do not. Sense perception is much more vivid and profound than imagination. Descartes purports to reach this conclusion having shut his eyes, stopped his ears, and having withdrawn from all of his senses (19). But if he purports to know a difference between imagination and sense perception by stopping all sense perception, then it could also be argued that there is a fundamental, *qualitative* difference between imagination and sense perception, rendering his thought experiment false. If he stops sense perception to be able to identify imagination, then he knows that there is a qualitative difference between sense perception and imagination.

⁵³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 19.

that same cause.”⁵⁴ In other words, the cause must be greater than its effect. One thing that seems to follow for Descartes from this is that something cannot come into existence out of nothing.⁵⁵

Descartes’ argument for God causing the idea of God in his mind goes like this. If Descartes exists as a thinking thing, then his mind was brought into existence by God as its cause, since something that exists must have been caused by something else. And since the cause must be greater than the effect, then the mind must have been created by something greater than itself. If the mind has the idea of God and was created by something greater than itself, then this something else must be God. Thus, the mind was created by God. Furthermore, since the mind was created by God and has the idea of God, then the idea of God must have been caused by God on the basis that something must be caused by something else, and the cause must be greater than the effect. Since there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one for Descartes,⁵⁶ then God must have put the idea of God in Descartes’ mind when God created him. The idea of a supreme being could not be generated by a finite being. As a result, God must have put the idea of God in Descartes’ mind.⁵⁷

There is more to the story, however, because Descartes must also show that the idea of God was not generated by himself. To contend that he himself did not generate the idea of God Descartes argues that the idea of God is innate. He claims that the idea of God is innate in

⁵⁴ Descartes, *Meditations*, 22. This concept also existed in medieval thought. One wonders, therefore, whether the “light of nature” is a construct of Descartes’ so that he can get around the inconsistency of using a concept from medieval thought which he had claimed to reject in his systematic doubting.

⁵⁵ Descartes, *Meditations*, 22.

⁵⁶ Descartes, *Meditations*, 25.

⁵⁷ Descartes, *Meditations*, 29–30, where he says that “when I take note of the fact that I doubt, or that I am a thing that is incomplete and dependent, there comes to mind a clear and distinct idea of a being that is independent and complete, that is, an idea of God. And from the mere fact that such an idea is in me, or that I who has this idea exists, I draw the obvious conclusion that God also exists, and that my existence depends entirely upon him at each and every moment.”

himself as well as the idea of himself.⁵⁸ Descartes thinks that the innateness of the idea of God is critical because its innateness allows it to be clear and distinct, that he did not make it up out of his own will. If Descartes had willed the idea of God, then that idea would not be necessary, with the result that it would be subject to doubt as generated by a finite being. If the idea of God is innate, then Descartes thinks he can claim that he did not generate it by his will. If he did not generate the idea of God by his will but still recognizes that he has it in his mind, then he can claim that the idea of God was caused by God.

There is one more step in the argument. Since the idea of God was put in Descartes' mind by God, the only thing left to do is argue that the idea of God contains the perfection of existence. So, Descartes argues that we could not conceive of God, that is, have the idea of God, without God having all perfections. One such perfection is existence.⁵⁹ Something that does not exist could not be considered perfect, but God is perfect. Since the idea of God was caused by God, then the idea of God is not about nothing but about something that exists. Since that idea necessarily contains the perfection of existence, then God must necessarily exist.

Now that Descartes thinks that he has proved God's existence, he can conclude that the world exists, though not in a manner that is identical with how the senses perceive it. Being able to prove the existence of the world after skeptically doubting it is exactly why the existence of God is necessary to his epistemology. God's existence is needed to solve an epistemological problem so that reason in the abstract sense of the *cogito* can become the foundation for the sciences. So, having thought he proved the existence of "God," Descartes states: "For since God has given me ... a great inclination to believe that these ideas [of corporeal things] issue from

⁵⁸ Descartes, *Meditations*, 28, where he states that "the only option remaining is that this idea [of God] is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me."

⁵⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 37.

corporeal things, I fail to see how God could be understood not to be a deceiver if these ideas were to issue from a source other than corporeal things. And, consequently, corporeal things exist.”⁶⁰ In other words, God exists. God is not a deceiver. We know this by the light of nature. Therefore, Descartes can be certain that the ideas he has about external objects are true and accurately resemble those objects because God could not deceive him about them. In other words, God’s existence guarantees the accuracy of the ideas of the world that are in the mind. It is as Searle explains regarding George Berkeley’s further development of modern idealism in which accurate knowledge of the world is guaranteed by God: “We can have objective knowledge that there is a tree in the quad even when we are not looking at it because God is always perceiving the tree in the quad.”⁶¹

Descartes argued further for his conclusion about God guaranteeing knowledge of the world by connecting external objects to the faculty of imagination.⁶² In Descartes’ view, imagination is the faculty that is connected to the senses. Imagination is different from “pure intellection” or the faculty of understanding.⁶³ As such, the faculty of imagination must be part of his body. Accordingly, it follows—in a strange logical move—that the faculty of imagination is something distinct from himself, from his essence as a thinking thing.⁶⁴ The logical move comes about even if it seems strange because logic is supposed to be determinative for Descartes. The power of imagining must inhere in some substance, but that substance cannot be his mind since imagination is tied to the senses which are part of his body. Therefore, the power of imagining

⁶⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 44–45.

⁶¹ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 30.

⁶² Descartes, *Meditations*, 40, where he says that imagination “appears to be simply a certain application of the knowing faculty to a body intimately present to it.”

⁶³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 40–41.

⁶⁴ Descartes, *Meditations*, 44.

must depend on something distinct from himself.⁶⁵ What is that something else? It is God. Thus, God is responsible for the ideas of things produced by the imagination of external objects. Since all ideas exist both formally and objectively in God⁶⁶ and God cannot be a deceiver—which the light of nature teaches, it must follow that the world exists in a manner consistent with the ideas in the mind because God is the active agent of the imagination in putting ideas before the mind.

Descartes is not suggesting here that we know objects in the world by virtue of the senses, since the “sensory grasp is in many cases very obscure and confused.”⁶⁷ Rather, he asserts that the world exists and is grasped in terms of what one can clearly and distinctly understand, which is to say that it is “encompassed in the object of pure mathematics.”⁶⁸ Since God makes it possible to clearly and distinctly understand anything,⁶⁹ the existence of God guarantees the truth of pure mathematics. God, therefore, becomes the basis of science through the laws of nature and mathematics where science shows us how things really are. This is why Descartes needs God’s existence and argues for it as a necessary deduction of reason and as a first principle of philosophy that becomes a foundation for science.

Descartes’ affirming God’s existence does not affirm, in any way, therefore, getting reliable knowledge in an outside-in manner through the senses. In fact, it affirms just the opposite. Knowledge of God comes from within the mind, and knowledge of the world comes from within the mind either through pure mathematics or through the ideas God puts before the mind through the imagination.

⁶⁵ Descartes, *Meditations*, 41.

⁶⁶ Descartes, *Meditations*, 26.

⁶⁷ Descartes, *Meditations*, 45.

⁶⁸ Descartes, *Meditations*, 45.

⁶⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 43; Descartes, *Discourse*, 21.

Now that Descartes has God back in view, scientific investigation can proceed from effect to cause because it can be posited that God has established the laws of nature such that nature can function on its own. The laws of nature, for Descartes, consist of “the infinite perfections of God” and are universal. There could be no world where such laws did not exist and govern.⁷⁰ There can be no exceptions. The laws of nature are absolute. Moreover, Descartes can regard nature itself as ordered and known because God exists. In fact, Descartes understands nature to be “nothing other than God himself or the ordered network of created things which was instituted by God.”⁷¹ As such, there could be no activity of God in physical reality contrary to the laws of nature. Any activity that is contrary to the laws of nature would be tantamount to being contrary to God. It would be inconsistent for God to do anything contrary to the laws of nature, because that would be tantamount to God being inconsistent with himself. It is significant and ironic that in this connection Descartes lays the groundwork for a concept of naturalistic evolution and uniformitarianism on the basis of God being the ground and guarantee of the laws of nature.⁷² Since Descartes’ concept of “God” does not allow for any action of God in physical reality that is not consistent with the laws of nature, his concept of “God” is not at all friendly to Christian theology and a taxonomy of the Gospel.

Whether a person wants Descartes’ arguments for the existence of God to succeed or not, there are fatal flaws and theological problems in his argument that must be recognized.

⁷⁰ Descartes, *Discourse*, 24.

⁷¹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 45.

⁷² Descartes, *Discourse*, 25, where he states that “it is certain (and this is an opinion commonly accepted among theologians) that the action by which God preserves the world is precisely the same as that by which he created it; so that, even if, in the beginning, he had never given it any other form at all but that of a chaos, provided he established the laws of nature and bestowed his concurrence in order for nature to function just as it does ordinarily, one can believe, without doing injustice to the miracle of creation, that by this means alone all things that are purely material could over time have been rendered such as we now see them. And their nature is much easier to conceive, when one sees them coming to be little by little in this manner, than when once considers them only in their completed state.”

To begin with, Descartes relies on the innateness of the idea of “God.” This is a problem for Descartes because it involves an argument in a circle, which is a logical fallacy that is fatal to a rational argument. Descartes argues in a circle because he needs the idea of God to be innate in order to be able to argue that God caused the idea of God. By appealing to the innate idea of God, he assumes that God exists. Thus, he assumes that God exists in order to prove that God exists. This is an argument in a circle. It just amounts to assuming that God exists, which is not proof. In order for Descartes’ argument to be valid, rationally speaking, the innateness of the idea of God must have some source other than God, by which he could then establish God’s existence. If the idea of God has a source other than God which reason can know, then Descartes can use that idea to prove God’s existence without arguing in a circle. The idea of God having a source other than God, however, is precisely something that Descartes cannot affirm, because then God would not be perfect; God would be dependent on something else.⁷³ So, he must assume rather than prove the innateness of the idea of God. Assuming that, however, does not involve logically valid reasoning. It may be true that some idea of God is innate, but that could not be the basis of a rational argument, not as Descartes construes rationality.

Additionally, Descartes appeals to the image of God in his arguments for God’s existence. Descartes asserts that the idea of God is innate in the human mind because the human mind is made in the image of God.⁷⁴ The image of God, however, is not a proof of reason but the testimony of Scripture. The testimony of Scripture consists of authority, theology, and tradition in Descartes’ scheme of things. As such, Scripture was not supposed to be a valid source of

⁷³ At this point, Descartes, *Meditations*, 28, argues that God could not be dependent on something else because asserting such an idea leads to an infinite regress. An infinite regress is intolerable and illogical. Thus, the regress must stop at some “First Cause.” This renders “God” nothing other than the cessation of an infinite regress, the solution to a logical problem.

⁷⁴ Descartes, *Meditations*, 29.

knowledge for Descartes as it was swept aside in his systematic doubting. Appealing to the image of God, therefore, is not something Descartes can do and remain consistent.

Yet another problem is that Descartes claims to be “perceiving” ideas in his mind, including the idea of God, as an empirical exercise. He gives the impression that he can “glance” around his mind and “see” ideas there, like I am glancing around the room and seeing objects. My glancing around the room using my sight (sense perception) is an empirical exercise. Descartes’ glancing around the contents of his mind also seems to be an empirical exercise and not a matter of rational deduction. In other words, he identifies having ideas in his mind by observation, not by argument. He seems, therefore, to be involved in trying to prove by rational deduction what he otherwise finds in his mind by observation.

Moreover, Descartes seems to be objectifying his mind when he thinks he can perceive its contents. He seems to suggest that whatever the mind is, the “I,” it can look at itself objectively, that is, that the “I” as the subject (the observer) can perceive the contents of its own mind as the object or “idea” (the thing observed). The problem is just how the perceiver can perceive itself as an object. Descartes seems to suggest that his own mind is presented to himself as an “idea.” As such, the problem of being able to be sure that the idea of his own mind resembles his mind immediately arises. In order to verify that the idea of his mind corresponds to his mind he would have to be able to take a standpoint outside his mind where he could observe both his own mind and the idea of his own mind to compare them to each other. In order to do that, however, he would have to be outside himself. Or, he would have to postulate another mind within his mind to be able to make that comparison. This suggests, however, that he would be a mind within a mind. The only way to avoid such a result is to break down the subject-object dualism involved in having an idea of his own mind. When such subject-object dualism breaks down, however, the

subject and the object with respect to the mind become one. It is difficult to see, however, how there can be any clear and distinct “idea” of the “I” in one’s mind—on Descartes’ concept of “idea”—if the perceiver and object perceived are one. His concept of “idea” is a problem here. It seems that the most Descartes can assert is that there is consciousness. Such an assertion might be able to support the conclusion that he exists. It could not, however, support the assertion that he exists as an idea to himself, not on his concept of “idea” as a representation of some thing.

Descartes’ arguments for God’s existence also present theological problems. It is highly problematic from a theological standpoint for Descartes to contend that he has an “idea” of God and a “perception of the infinite.” An “idea” is an image of things as Descartes says.⁷⁵ An idea is supposed to resemble or represent the object of which it is the idea. Consequently, Descartes suggests that the human, finite mind has an idea that resembles or represents the infinite. It is not at all clear how Descartes thinks the human mind can do that, even on his own terms, since God in God’s essence is beyond human comprehension. It is also contrary to the Scriptures and the Christian tradition to suggest that the human mind can directly grasp God in His essence (John 1:18; John 6:46; Rom. 11:33–35; 1 Tim. 6:16). This suggests that whatever Descartes’ idea of “God” was supposed to be, it could not have been of God as understood in Christianity. His “God” was a merely philosophical concept, a first cause conceived of as a termination of an infinite regression that he needed for epistemological purposes to provide a ground for the natural sciences.⁷⁶ His concept of “God” does not involve personal action in relation to creation or in salvation of human beings. It provides no basis for God’s action in Jesus Christ, the Creeds, or the Gospel.

⁷⁵ Descartes, *Meditations*, 20, 38.

⁷⁶ Descartes, *Meditations*, 28.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESCARTES' THEORY OF SENSE PERCEPTION AND THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

Descartes' theory of sense perception and his development of what came to be known in philosophy as the mind-body problem were two important aspects of his thought that relate to and result from his arguments for the *cogito*. Descartes' theory of sense perception and his treatment of the mind-body problem have also had far-reaching implications for Christian theology. Consequently, understanding how Descartes argued for these aspects of his thought is important for understanding how modern philosophy impacts theology and in preparing for a critique of modern philosophy with a view toward freeing theology from its constraints.

Descartes' Theory of Sense Perception and Its Implications

Descartes' theory of sense perception is the RTP. It has had and still has an enormous impact in modern thought.¹ His theory arose out of his treatment of sense perception in relation to illusions, as was discussed above. It is also related to his contentions regarding dreams. The fact that there can be illusions, such as the straight stick that looks bent when dipped in water, caused Descartes to doubt that sense perception could give knowledge of the world the way it really is. But this gives rise to a question: If one does not see objects in the world as they really are when one is looking at them, then what does one really see when one is engaging the sense of

¹ Smith, *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory*, 16, explains that “[t]he doctrine of representative perception as formulated by Descartes has exercised, from the seventeenth century onwards, [an] overwhelming ... influence upon all subsequent philosophical thinking, and in one form or another still has ... many adherents. ... Indeed, so universal has been its influence, in Kant and his successors, hardly less than in Berkeley and Hume, in Spinoza and Leibniz, that present-day writers almost invariably define their respective positions in terms either of their partial agreement, or of their total disagreement, with it.”

sight? The answer would then pertain to the other senses.² Descartes' answer to the question is the RTP.

Why the RTP Is a Relevant Problem for Christian Theology

The reader could wonder, however, what Descartes' thinking behind the RTP and its implications has to do with Christian theology. Isn't Descartes' theory of sense perception and the RTP just a philosophical problem to be debated by philosophers? What importance could a theory of sense perception have for theology?

It turns out that a philosophical theory of sense perception has immense importance for Christian theology. The key role sense perception plays in a taxonomy of the Gospel shows this. The apostles (as well as many others; 1 Cor. 15:1–8) claim to have seen Jesus physically alive again after His death and physically touched His living body (1 John 1:1). Moreover, their apprehending Jesus' resurrection through sense perception gave rise to the Gospel and Christian theology. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul claims that faith comes by *hearing*, that is, by hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). We could also extend faith coming by hearing to faith arising from the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Sense perception is centrally involved in hearing the Gospel and in these Sacraments. Sense perception, therefore, is involved in the Gospel and coming to faith according to the apostles in the taxonomy of the Gospel. If philosophy, however, posits a skeptical theory of sense perception, then the role of sense perception in theology is undermined with serious implications for what can be asserted to be true in theology and how we come to know anything in theology in relation to the Gospel.

In addition, philosophical thinking regarding sense perception is directly relevant to

² The senses of smell, taste, touch, and hearing are not as subject to illusion as the sense of sight can be. Descartes, however, lumps them together.

theology because modern theologians have used skepticism toward sense perception as a reason for placing the source of sure and certain knowledge in theology in the mind or will of the theologian or Christian. In other words, the RTP has been pivotal in giving rise to subjectivism and the inside-out way of knowing in theology and a concomitant skepticism and disregard toward an outside-in way of knowing. This is true in liberal theology. It can also be true in conservative theology in spite of the fact that most conservative theologians would formally affirm an outside-in way of knowing.

Søren Kierkegaard presents a good example of how a skeptical view of sense perception can be directly related to an inside-out way of knowing that is typical of liberal theology, though he is usually regarded as the father of existentialism. Kierkegaard claimed that “truth is spirit, ... an inward transformation, a realization of inwardness.”³ He went on to state that “the movement of the spirit is inward, that the truth is the subject’s transformation in himself.”⁴ He regarded the inward movement as infinite.⁵ The transcendent is found within the human subject. Kierkegaard found truth in inward transformation because he was skeptical of sense perception. He stated, “The study of Greek scepticism [sic] is much to be recommended. There one may learn thoroughly ... that the certainty of sense perception, to say nothing of historical certainty, is uncertainty, is only an approximation; and that the positive and immediate relationship to it [i.e., the certainty of sense perception] is the negative.”⁶ Accordingly, Kierkegaard went on to state that “it is impossible in the case of historical problems to reach an objective decision so certain that no doubt could disturb it. This also serves to show that the problem ought to be put

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 37.

⁴ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 38.

⁵ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 37–38.

⁶ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 38.

subjectively.”⁷ Thus, skepticism toward sense perception leads to certainty in theology being found in the ego, that is, subjectively. The source of truth must be some operation of “spirit” in the inward man. Truth must be inwardness.

It is inciteful how Kierkegaard links sense perception and history. It is striking how Kierkegaard dismisses history as a legitimate source of knowledge in theology on the grounds that historical knowledge can only be an approximation, that is, based on probability. This is striking because of how Kierkegaard’s concerns about certainty echo Descartes’ quest for certainty and his finding the ground of certainty in the ego. Of course, how Descartes and Kierkegaard depict the ground of certainty in the ego is different. Descartes in his rationalism seeks certainty in deductive thought. Kierkegaard in his existentialism seeks certainty in an inward transformation brought about by “spirit.” Accordingly, will or choice, the “leap of faith,” become central to Kierkegaard’s thought.

Kierkegaard’s appeal to “spirit” may make it seem like a “Christian” answer. His answer to epistemological problems, however, is laden with the presuppositions of Cartesian thought. This is the case because Kierkegaard’s way of truth consists of finding bedrock and certainty in the operations of the ego, even if such operations are construed differently than in Descartes’ rationalism. Both Descartes and Kierkegaard find certainty in the ego based, in part, on a skeptical view of sense perception. Kierkegaard, like Descartes, requires indubitable certainty as the standard of truth. Since Kierkegaard regards sense perception as uncertain, he puts the decision of the Christian ego at the center of Christian faith, rather than in God’s action in Christ that transforms the ego from without. This is subjectivism because it finds truth in the ego. The thought of Descartes and Kierkegaard have a family resemblance.

⁷ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 41.

Kierkegaard's kind of subjectivism, however, is not supposed to be a problem for conservative theology because such theology formally rejects subjectivism and existentialism and affirms the outside-in way of knowing based on formal affirmations of the inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture. What happens, however, in conservative theology if the truthfulness of the RTP is assumed? Can conservative theology avoid subjectivism and an inside-out way of knowing when the RTP is assumed? If it can be shown that at least some conservative theology assumes the RTP and also affirms a way of knowing in theology that places the source of theological truth in inward operations going on in the human mind, as with Descartes and Kierkegaard, then it can be shown that the RTP can pose huge problems for conservative theology, the same problems that plague existentialist and liberal theology.

It will be shown below that the RTP is, in fact, assumed in at least some conservative theology and poses big problems for it. This will be shown in relation to Carl Henry's theology of divine revelation. Henry explicitly adopts the RTP and describes divine revelation as an inward operation in the human mind. All this is to say at this point that a philosophical discussion of Descartes' treatment of sense perception and the RTP is vitally important for conservative theology, even though such theology formally affirms an outside-in way of knowing.

Since the RTP poses significant problems for both liberal and conservative theology, it will become important to offer a critique of it. This critique will be provided below in chapter nine. The critique will rely on the analyses of J. L. Austin and John Searle, who argued against the RTP. Searle specifically argued against the RTP in favor of "direct realism." In Searle's concept of "direct realism," "[sense] perception is an intentional and causal transaction between mind and

the world,”⁸ something that the RTP does not affirm. In his terminology, the term “realism” denotes that sense perception gives reliable access to the real world. The term “direct” denotes that we do not perceive something else, that is, an “idea” or “sense datum” in perceiving the world as the RTP asserts.⁹ Austin’s and Searle’s arguments are important for Christian theology because if the RTP can be shown to be based on faulty reasoning, then the way is open from the standpoint of a philosophical critique of a philosophical theory to relieve theology of the foundationalism of modern idealism. Speech Act Theory can then also be used to account for important phenomena that are present in a taxonomy of the Gospel, phenomena that reflect an outside-in way of knowing and do not support a determinative subjectivism in theology.

Descartes’ Development of the RTP

Since sense perception involves what philosophers think we can know through the senses of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch, a theory of sense perception becomes a vitally important concern in epistemology. Accordingly, a theory of sense perception is important because the human mind can only relate to the physical world and what happens there through the senses. An implication of the RTP is that the mind is not directly related to the physical world in terms of knowledge. Thus, the RTP as a theory of sense perception casts doubt on the human mind being able to know anything by being acted upon from outside itself through the senses by any activity occurring in the physical world. We saw this in Descartes’ finding bedrock of knowledge in the *cogito* and his contention that the physical world can only be known through purely intellectual operations of the mind apart from sense perception. For these reasons, an examination of

⁸ John R. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 49.

⁹ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 15.

Descartes' development of the RTP is vitally important to theology.

Tracing the development of the RTP leads back to the question that arose at the point of Descartes' skepticism toward sense perception based on illusions. The question that arose there was just what a person sees when using the sense of sight, if it cannot be asserted with confidence that a person sees the physical world as it is when looking at something. The important answer given in the RTP is that what a person "sees" is not the world as it is but a representation of the world, an "idea." This representation or "idea" exists in the mind, not in the world. This is Descartes' concept of idea as a representation or image of a thing. Diogenes Allen explains that "[a]ccording to the [RTP], which we saw in operation in Descartes, ... [w]e are never *directly* aware of external objects in sense perception but of *representations* of them which we call 'ideas.'"¹⁰ The "ideas" have had many names including "sense data."¹¹ Descartes put it like this:

But what was it about these things that I clearly perceived? Surely the fact that the ideas or thoughts of these things were hovering before my mind. But even now I do not deny that these ideas are in me. Yet there was something else I used to affirm, which, owing to my habitual tendency to believe it, I used to think was something I clearly perceived, even though I actually did not perceive it [at] all: namely, that certain things existed outside me, things from which those ideas proceeded and which those ideas completely resembled.¹²

In this passage, Descartes asserts that what one sees—he says "perceives"—consists of ideas "hovering before [the] mind," and he asserts that what a person does not "perceive" at all is the

¹⁰ Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 181. Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 29, also explains that, pursuant to the RTP, we do not see material objects directly but only representations of them in our minds. She also relates this to modern philosophy's inside-out character.

¹¹ Sunny Auyang, *Mind in Everyday Life and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 31, explains that "[i]deas, what the old empiricists called the internal entities that allegedly separate mind from external things and events, have acquired many other names: sense impressions, sense data, stimuli, surface irritation, transducer input, activation vectors, mentalese, symbols, [and] most generally, mental representations."

¹² Descartes, *Meditations*, 19–20.

thing in the physical world that the idea is about, which the idea is supposed to resemble. What one sees or perceives is the idea in the mind, not the thing in the world. This is the RTP. What one sees or otherwise senses are ideas in the mind that are representations of phenomena in the world.¹³

The RTP is counter-intuitive. We normally think that we directly perceive an object or a phenomenon¹⁴ through sense perception that exists independently of our minds in the physical world. Searle regards it as a “default position” of human thought that a real world exists independently of our minds and that we have “direct perceptual access to that world through our senses.”¹⁵ In direct perceptual access there is just one thing that is perceived in sense perception, which is the object or phenomenon in the world that is perceived directly through the senses. In Descartes’ concept of idea, however, there are two things involved in sense perception. One is the external object or phenomenon. The other is the “idea” of the object or phenomenon in the mind.¹⁶ Only the idea is actually seen or perceived by the mind.

These considerations can be illustrated like this. Assume that I am looking at my poodle. I take my poodle to be an object that exists in front of me independently of my mind in the physical world. It has certain characteristics, such as shape, color, the expressions on its face and

¹³ For Descartes, *Meditations*, 23, ideas have a formal aspect which is supposed to be provided by the mind as a mode of thought, and an objective aspect, which is supposed to relate to the object to which the idea refers. Accordingly, Descartes, *Meditations*, 5, posits that the concept of “idea” “can be taken either materially, for an operation of the intellect . . . , or *objectively*, for the thing *represented* by means of that operation [emphasis added].” Descartes, *Meditations*, 20, also captures the concept of representation by referring to ideas as “images of things.”

¹⁴ When I think of a phenomenon in the world, I am thinking of objects, but I am also thinking of smells, sounds, feeling certain things like heat, and the like, which relate to the senses of smell, hearing, and touch. Smells, sounds, heat are physical but different than objects. Sound waves or infra red radiation, for example, are different than my computer screen.

¹⁵ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 10.

¹⁶ This raises the question as to whether the “idea” is a mental entity of some kind. Spruit, *Species Intelligibilis*, 2:388, explains that Descartes’ theory of representation did not necessarily mean that “the idea would be a ‘tertium quid,’” that is, a third thing. Subsequent theories of metaphysical idealism, however, seem to give ideas a metaphysical status.

in its eyes, and physical dimensions. Descartes maintains that my mind is not directly *seeing* my poodle when I am looking at it. Rather, my mind is directly *seeing* the “idea” of my poodle “hovering” before it. It is this idea that the mind “*sees*.” My poodle and the idea of it hovering before the mind are two distinct kinds of things, ontologically speaking. My poodle is a physical object in the world. An idea is not physical and is usually thought of as mental. It exists in the mind. In the RTP, the idea of my poodle is supposed to represent my poodle by resembling it.

When it comes to resemblance, Descartes identified what he used to think, that the external physical thing was “sending its likeness” of itself into his mind.¹⁷ He then rejected this explanation of resemblance because ideas could be formed in his mind by dreams, where there was no physical thing there.¹⁸ He also rejected that account of resemblance because he could have two distinct ideas of the sun, one idea purportedly drawn from the senses and the other from astronomical reasoning. In the idea of the sun generated through sense perception, the sun looks relatively small. In the idea of the sun generated through astronomical reasoning, it is realized that the sun is immense and much bigger than it appears through sense perception. If these ideas suggest two distinct sizes for the sun, then they cannot be the same idea, and only the one drawn from astronomical reasoning is correct.¹⁹ Therefore, resemblance based on a supposition that the physical thing “sends its likeness” into the mind could not be correct. But then this leaves the question dangling just how to account for the idea being able to resemble the thing of which it is the idea.

Why does Descartes argue for the concept of an idea in relation to sense perception in the first place? The following considerations could be adduced. First, Descartes is committed to

¹⁷ Descartes, *Meditations*, 21.

¹⁸ Descartes, *Meditations*, 22.

¹⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 22.

finding indubitable certainty. He thought that such certainty could only be found in clear and distinct ideas that are in the mind. Sense perception does not yield absolute certainty because it can be “deceived” in some cases. An idea is a purely intellectual thing, free of such deception.

Descartes also argued for his concept of idea in relation to the RTP because of his skepticism toward the reliability of sense perception based on illusions. He also brought his thought experiment regarding the melting wax to bear such that the essence of the wax could only be apprehended by the mind apart from the senses.²⁰ It seems that his commitment to the distinction between the essence of things and “secondary qualities” asserted by Galileo in the new science is directly involved here.²¹ In his words, “the *perception* of the wax is neither a seeing, nor a touching, nor an imagining. Nor has it ever been, even though it previously seemed so; rather it is an inspection on the part of the mind alone.”²² What the wax “really is” is perceived only by the mind, apart from the senses.²³ For Descartes “it does not appear that nature teaches us to conclude anything ... from these sense perceptions unless the intellect has first conducted its own inquiry regarding things external to us. For it seems to belong exclusively to the mind, and not to the composite of mind and body, to know the truth in these matters.”²⁴ As Smith says, “Descartes accordingly condemns our *sense*-experience as concealing from us the true nature of reality, and as not being what we usually interpret it is as being, a correct

²⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 16–17.

²¹ Smith, *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory*, 21, explains that Descartes was “constrained to acceptance of the doctrine [of the RTP] by the physical teaching of his younger contemporary, Galileo, and by the necessity, as he himself contended, of employing similar methods in the biological sciences. In Descartes’ time philosophy and science were not distinguished from one another; and the doctrine of representative perception was ... in his eyes as much the direct outcome of scientific inquiry as any of the more specific conclusions to which it had led.”

²² Descartes, *Meditations*, 17, emphasis added.

²³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 18, where he asserts that “what I thought I had seen with my eyes, I actually grasped with the faculty of judgment, which is in my mind.”

²⁴ Descartes, *Meditations*, 46.

apprehension of the world we live in.”²⁵ Thus, in his analysis related to optical illusions and the distinction between the essence of the wax and its secondary qualities, which qualities are perceived by the senses, Descartes concluded that he could not be sure that he was seeing the world as it is, with the result that he could not affirm a theory of sense perception where the senses perceive the world directly. The mind must, therefore, be perceiving ideas of things. This Cartesian, scientific view of things drives the RTP and still does so today.²⁶

Furthermore, Descartes’ derived his concept of “idea” from his analysis of dreams. He put it like this: “[E]verything I ever thought I *sensed* while awake I could believe I also sometimes *sensed* while asleep, and since I do not believe that what I seem to *sense* in my dreams comes to me from things external to me, I saw no reason why I should hold this belief about those things I seem to be *sensing* while awake.”²⁷ In other words, he asserted that the imagination puts images, that is, ideas, before the mind. The imagination sometimes put images of things before the mind while dreaming. Since such ideas occur while dreaming, one knows that the idea does not relate to any external object or phenomenon. Thus, there must be an idea of an object as well as the object, which idea is what the mind really sees. If this is true while dreaming, it must be true all the time, even when the human being is engaged in sense perception of an object that is really

²⁵ Smith, *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory*, 32.

²⁶ Smith, *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory*, 21, attributes the persistence of the RTP and its “mischief” in philosophy, in the face of criticism, to the belief “that no other interpretation of sense-experience is consistent with the teaching of the positive sciences, and that the RTP alone, therefore, has the prestige of these sciences behind it.” Smith, *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory*, 25, goes on to explain that “[w]hen the aims of the positive sciences are thus interpreted in strictly mechanical terms [a la Galileo and Descartes], all qualitative changes are shouldered off into the mental realm. The physicist is well satisfied to be thus able to expel them from his territory; and when the physiologist, following his example, does so likewise, [qualitative changes] fall to be treated by the psychologist. And since there is no further domain into which [qualitative changes] can be ejected, the psychologist has to come to terms with the many puzzling problems which they involve, either by some . . . type of epiphenomenalism as the physicist has been so careful to avoid, or, upon the bankruptcy of this way of thinking, by means of parallelism, or, when this likewise proves untenable, by falling back upon that biological restatement of nineteenth century epiphenomenalism which is now current under the title behaviourism.”

²⁷ Descartes, *Meditations*, 43, emphasis added.

there. As a result, he thinks that his analysis of dreams allows him to posit that a person sees an idea of a thing while not actually seeing the thing. And if it is God that puts ideas of things in the imagination, as was noted above, then Descartes could think that he has a basis for confidence in asserting that ideas of things in the mind resemble the things in the world. Putting all of these considerations together yields the RTP. But it is important to note that the RTP starts with a skeptical analysis of sense perception based on illusions and the wax thought experiment.

A point of criticism of the RTP in relation to Descartes' wax thought experiment can be offered at this point. This criticism pertains to how he could know that the wax was an enduring substance without also knowing what happens to its "secondary qualities" through sense perception. He did notice changes in the secondary qualities of the wax through the senses as the wax melted, and he took the senses as providing reliable information relating to the changes in the wax. He could not have known that the wax was changing as heat was applied without receiving accurate information through his senses. It seems evident, therefore, that Descartes reached conclusions about the wax by noticing changes in its qualities through sense perception, with the result that his knowledge about the wax came about precisely as a composite between mind and body, contrary to his own claims.

Smith criticizes the RTP precisely at this point by explaining that reasoning for the RTP starts from a realist standpoint, but then abandons the realist standpoint to posit the RTP. The realist standpoint contends that we have real and direct epistemological access to the world through the senses. Descartes is not being consistent in the wax thought experiment because he obtains accurate information about the changes in the wax through the senses—information that is consistent with the realist standpoint—and then jettisons the realist standpoint in order to reach the RTP on the basis that sense perception does not provide knowledge of the essential nature of

things.²⁸ It is not consistent to begin with realism, which affirms direct perceptual access to the world, and conclude with the RTP, which denies such direct perceptual access in favor of the concept of idea.

Descartes' formulation of the RTP is relatively easy to state, but it has enormous consequences. If a person only sees the idea of a thing in the mind, then an epistemological issue of the relationship between that idea and the external object or phenomenon to which that idea relates immediately arises. The issue here involves being able to know that the idea accurately resembles the thing of which it is an idea. Descartes himself recognized this issue.²⁹ This issue is an inherent problem with any concept of "idea" or "sense datum" that involves resemblance as representation. If there can be no confidence that the idea accurately represents or resembles its object, then skepticism immediately arises in a way that is intrinsic to sense perception.³⁰

The issue of whether the idea of a thing accurately resembles the thing produces a gap or chasm between the mind and the external world in relation to knowledge. This is an epistemological problem that can be referred to as a truth-gap. This truth-gap became *the* epistemological problem of the modern outlook.³¹ As Murphy points out, the RTP requires an argument that can "justify the claim that the mental contents give true and accurate knowledge of

²⁸ Smith, *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory*, 41.

²⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 21, where he queries: "Just what reason do I have for believing that these ideas resemble those things?"

³⁰ Paul Vincent Spade, "Medieval Philosophy," in *The Oxford History of Western Philosophy*, ed. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 63, states that for Augustine, for example, "[t]he difficulty with sensation is that it presents us with objects only ... through a representation or sense-image of them. All the usual problems with representational theories of knowledge follow at once."

³¹ Rorty, *Mirror of Nature*, 3, states: "To know is to represent accurately what is outside the mind; so to understand the possibility and nature of knowledge is to understand the way in which the mind is able to construct such representations." Spruit, *Species Intelligibilis*, 2:544, describes the problem of the truth gap inherent in the RTP when he states that "[m]ost moderns denied that there is a resemblance between things and ideas, but they often had no satisfactory alternative to explain how ideas or acts of perception may represent their objects."

what is outside the mind.”³² It turns out, however, that the RTP has created the problem that “ideas become a *veil of perception* that drops between mind and things, creating an inner and an outer realm.”³³ This “veil of perception” creates a mind-world dichotomy in which the mind is cut-off from the physical world. As a result, the mind and world exist in two different spheres and do not relate to each other when it comes to knowledge. The fact-value split arises once again.

It turns out that Descartes’ concept of God comes in precisely to bridge the truth-gap created by the RTP. Descartes and the early modern idealists argued for an immediate and direct operation of God on the mind in order to guarantee being able to know the existence of the external world and the truthfulness of the ideas one has about that world. We referred to this in the discussion of Descartes “proving” God’s existence for epistemological purposes. Spruit explains that for Arnold Geulincx (d. 1669), a disciple of Descartes, “[t]he correlation between bodily motions and sensations is the work of God, who installs the appearances before the mind. The human mind is a mere observer of this arrangement of things.”³⁴ Likewise, Nicolas Malebranche (d. 1715), another disciple of Descartes, used God to bridge the gap between the mental and the physical created by the RTP.³⁵ George Berkeley (d. 1753), an ontological idealist, likewise used God to ensure the existence of physical objects. Berkeley did this by asserting that the existence and knowledge of physical objects is guaranteed because they are ideas in God’s mind, which are reflected in the human mind.³⁶ Searle explains that epistemic objectivity,

³² Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 29.

³³ Auyang, *Mind*, 31, emphasis added.

³⁴ Spruit, *Species Intelligibilis*, 2:441.

³⁵ Kenny, *Rise of Modern Philosophy*, 58–59.

³⁶ Kenny, *Rise of Modern Philosophy*, 145.

according to Berkeley, is guaranteed by God: “We can have objective knowledge that there is a tree in the quad even when we are not looking at it because God is always perceiving the tree in the quad.”³⁷ When the RTP is in play, therefore, truth comes into the mind in a manner unrelated to external phenomenon or acts and unmediated through God’s physical actions in history, culture, ceremony, ritual, or speech.

When the conceptual framework of the RTP is applied in theology, the way of knowing becomes inside-out where truth becomes inward transformation, as with Kierkegaard, or an immediate operation of divine revelation going on in the human mind, as we will see with Carl Henry. As a result, the RTP gives rise to subjectivism and provides a conceptual framework for a modern form of enthusiasm in theology. The inability to account for the relevance of history and external means immediately follows from such a framework.

Later in modernity a rationalist conception of God could not be appealed to for epistemological guarantees. Kant assumed Descartes’ RTP,³⁸ but he could no longer solve the problem of the truth-gap by appealing to a conception of God as a matter of pure reason, since he did not think that human reason could prove God’s existence. Rather, he appealed to structures in the human mind as the lawgiver of nature to solve the problem.³⁹ Such a resolution, however, does not escape subjectivism but affirms it.

By way of critique for a moment, an important criticism of Descartes’ development of the RTP, that both Austin and Searle use, and which will be discussed fully below, is Descartes’ inconsistent use of terms, such as “perceive” or “sense” and their cognates, along with the word

³⁷ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 30.

³⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 24.

³⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 47, states, that “the order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle *nature*, we ourselves introduce [emphasis original].” Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 148, goes on to state that the human faculty of the “understanding” “is itself the lawgiver of nature.”

“idea.” He used such terms inconsistently in the examples of the wax, the two ideas of the sun, and of dreaming. In the example of dreaming, for example, he used the word “sense” to refer to images placed before the mind by the imagination while dreaming and also to what the senses are doing when a person is fully awake. These two operations of “sensing,” however, are quite different from each other and not the same thing. Memory is involved in the case of dreaming, while sense perception is involved when fully awake. Human beings know the difference, as even Descartes admits.⁴⁰ Waking and dreaming do not have the same characteristics and quality. To refer to them both as sensing, as if they were the same constitutes the fallacy of an ambiguous use of terms. In the thought experiment of the wax, Descartes uses the word “perceive” for both the mind perceiving the ideas in the mind and the senses perceiving the wax, but these two instances of “perceiving” constitute two different operations. The mind perceives differently than the senses do. To use the same word for both operations as if the operations were the same likewise constitutes the fallacy of an ambiguous use of terms. The same criticism holds in Descartes’ argument against sense perception in his example of the idea of the sun where Descartes uses the word “idea” in connection with sense perception and then in connection with astronomical reasoning as an intellectual operation. Once again, sense perception and the intellectual operation involved in astronomical reasoning are not the same sort of thing. Thus, Descartes’ use of the word “idea” for both in his argument relating to the sun constitutes the fallacy of an ambiguous use of terms.

A Critique of Disregarding Secondary Qualities in the Interests of Science

It has been discussed above how Galileo and Descartes imposed an epistemological

⁴⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 50.

judgment on secondary qualities in the interests of the new science and in Descartes' development of the *cogito* and his theory of sense perception. It can be argued, however, that their treatment of secondary qualities is unreasonable and problematic. Their treatment of secondary qualities is problematic because it implies that they exist only subjectively in the mind of the beholder. If that implication is intended, it leads directly to subjectivism. Their treatment of secondary qualities is unreasonable because it consists of reducing *a priori* the field of what should be regarded as meaningful and important knowledge. Secondary qualities perceived by the senses constitute a whole field of knowledge that human beings regard as meaningful and important in human life and society. It is a prejudice, therefore, to disregard secondary qualities perceived by the senses as objective knowledge solely for the interests of science. The following thoughts are, therefore, proffered to point out the invalidity of disregarding secondary qualities as meaningful knowledge in the interests of science. These thoughts are important because they call into question the validity of the fact-value split.

Descartes adduced two ideas of the sun to argue against the reliability of sense perception. He argued that the only valid idea of the sun was that which astronomical reasoning provides in relation to the sun's true and accurate size. The implication is that the only valid and meaningful knowledge of the sun consists of knowing its true and accurate size. Perceiving the sun with the senses, however, can have significant meaning apart from the interests of the scientist, that is, apart from pinning down just how big the sun is and what moves around what. Novelist Frederick Forsyth captures the non-scientific meaning of the sun in a passage about Major Uri Ben-Shaul, of the Israeli army, who arose before sunrise to go to the mausoleum of the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem to say the *Kaddish* for a fellow Jew who had died in obscurity and all alone. Forsyth writes:

[Major Uri Ben-Shaul] drove eastward out of Tel Aviv and took the road to Jerusalem. There was a stillness about the dawn that he loved, a peace and a cleanness that never ceased to cause him wonder. He had seen it a thousand times on patrol in the desert, the phenomenon of a sunrise, cool and beautiful, before the onset of a day of blistering heat and sometimes of combat and death. It was the best time of the day.⁴¹

Granted, there are aspects of this that could be regarded as subjective, like the references to peace and wonder and “the best time of day.” Yet, there are also objective aspects of it, such as seeing the sun actually rise—which does create wonder, the stillness of dawn, the dawn being cool and beautiful. And the objective and subjective aspects are both full of meaning and are related to each other, the former giving rise to the latter. The fact-value split cannot account for this. I have often experienced the same things while experiencing the sun rise while duck hunting. Indeed, the secondary qualities involved in perceiving the sun can provide a meaning to life that can be shared but that will be marginalized by disregarding secondary qualities as perceived by the senses for the sake of science.

Moreover, the objectivity of secondary qualities plays a significant role in human society and knowledge of things. Suppose that Mom has cinnamon rolls baking in the oven, and Dad comes in and says: “Wow that smells good, the cinnamon rolls baking in the oven.” And then one of the children comes in and says: “Wow that smells good, those cinnamon rolls baking in the oven.” And then Mom is filled with joy when Dad and the children are so excited about cinnamon rolls baking in the oven. And then they can share eating the cinnamon rolls together at table. The fact that more than one person smells the cinnamon rolls baking in the oven and knows what they are by the smell indicates that secondary qualities are not merely mental, that is, not subjective. The sense of smell is perceiving something that exists in the world. Moreover,

⁴¹ Frederick Forsyth, *The Odessa File* (New York; New American Library, 2012), 324.

it is evident that the smell of cinnamon rolls baking in the oven is related to the essence of the rolls in an important way, since it is the cinnamon rolls being baked, not roast beef, that makes the characteristic smell of cinnamon rolls. These facts indicate that secondary qualities exist as phenomena in the world independent of the mind, essential to specific things and waiting to be perceived by the mind through the senses as a shared experience.

In addition, consider stop-and-go lights. Such lights are an integral part of the conventions and institutions related to driving an automobile and traffic regulation. Difference in color is integral to such lights and, therefore, integral to the conventions and institutions of traffic regulation.⁴² Such conventions and institutions are not incidental to well being in human society. People rely on the color associated with such conventions and institutions to make driving safe and orderly. When someone “runs a red light” and “t-bones” someone else, they can cause severe injury. The injuries are real, can ruin someone’s life. They also can become part of a lawsuit. As a result, it is not subjective how the functionality of stop-and-go lights in regulating traffic flow depends on color, a so-called secondary quality. Color must be a shared experience in order for the stop-and-go lights to function for the purposes for which they are employed. Moreover, in such a scenario, the fact of a color gives rise to a value. Red means that the driver is supposed to stop. The purpose of stopping is to prevent injury to someone else and to bring order to the institution of driving and traffic. There are many objective ways in which secondary qualities are quite important, and they provide a connection between fact and value.

Accordingly, Descartes’ development of the RTP is subject to criticism when we note the objective status of secondary qualities and identify how important they are to human life, society,

⁴² With respect to people who are color blind, being able to recognize the brightness of the light that is shining is vitally important.

and knowing things. Yet, Descartes cannot account for secondary qualities objectively, that is, in a mind-independent way as a shared experience. It would seem that philosophy should be able to account for such basic human phenomena as cinnamon rolls and stop-and-go lights and how important they are to human society. Descartes and his theorizing about the RTP, however, cannot account for such things. The RTP involves a radical reduction. Descartes emphatically expresses this reduction when he explains that what he did in his thought experiment about the wax was to “distinguish the wax from its external forms, as if stripping it of its clothing, and look[ing] at the wax in its nakedness.”⁴³ Its external forms were perceived by the senses. Its nakedness was perceived by the mind alone. In doing so he stripped from philosophy the ability to account for relational and institutional factors in human life that have real world implications for the functioning of human society and human well being. As important to human life as science is, it can also involve a reduction that cannot account for a shared world of secondary qualities that are utterly important to human life. Adopting the RTP in the foundationalism of modern idealism, therefore, has profound negative consequences for the aspects of life that do not pertain to the interests of science. This also impacts theology and the life of the church.

As a result, the reductionism involved in Descartes’ skepticism toward sense perception and secondary qualities in the interests of science does not seem to be justified. Those disciplines, like Christian theology, that deeply involve actual physical events and things—like seeing and touching Jesus alive again and sacraments—that are perceived by sense perception through secondary qualities should be able to operate on their own terms free of the reductionistic and absolutist terms of the natural sciences. It becomes important, therefore, in the interests of theology to be able to relativize a reductive approach to the natural sciences, while

⁴³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 18.

affirming science's valid contributions to knowledge and human life and society. Insights of Speech Act Theory will be used for this purpose in chapters eight and ten below.

The Mind-Body Problem and Deism

In Descartes' development of the *cogito*, we saw how he defined mind and body as substances with mutually exclusive properties. Descartes defined the basic characteristic of mind as thought. He called mind a *res cogitans* or "thinking thing." He defined the chief characteristic of body as extension in time and space, a *res extensa* or "extended thing." This is Descartes' metaphysical dualism. Kenny explains the implication of Descartes' dualism by stating that "mind and matter [are] two great, mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive, divisions of the universe we inhabit."⁴⁴ This is the mind-body problem that Descartes brought into centrality in modern thought.⁴⁵

Descartes' treatment of mind and body becomes a problem because there can be no causal interaction between mind or spirit and anything physical. Mind, as a thinking thing, cannot have any causal interaction with a body, as an extended thing, on logical terms. Logic is supposed to be determinative with respect to understanding what could exist and how the world works. Based on logic any causal relation between mind and body is theoretically impossible as a matter of principle. Bertrand Russell explains that Descartes' conceptions of mind and body are "so dissimilar that an interaction seemed inconceivable."⁴⁶ This is seen in Malebranche, a disciple of

⁴⁴ Kenny, "Descartes to Kant," 113.

⁴⁵ Smith, *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory*, 126, remarks on how Galileo contributed to Descartes' mind-body dualism, when he states that "Galileo's discovery, not made until the seventeenth century . . . that motion (dynamically conceived) as ingenerable and as indestructible as matter itself, was undoubtedly one of the main causes which brought about the Cartesian dualism—motion being interpreted as a mode of extension, and therefore as opposite to mind."

⁴⁶ Russell, *History*, 562.

Descartes who extended Descartes' thought to assert that "if mind was pure thought, and matter was pure extension, neither could act upon the other. Mind and body run parallel, but do not interact."⁴⁷ Russell identifies the implication when he says that "[m]y arm moves when I will that it shall move, but my will is a mental phenomenon and the motion of my arm a physical phenomenon. Why then, if mind and matter cannot interact, does my body behave *as if* my mind controlled it?"⁴⁸ Searle likewise identifies this problem with respect to human action by asking: "How could mental states, which are not physical and thus not part of the physical world, act causally on the physical world?"⁴⁹ In Descartes' formulation of mind and body, mental states cannot act causally on the physical world.

Accordingly, the mind-body problem leads to deism. Deism is a view in which some concept of God is said to exist but that such a "God" does not interact causally with the physical world. God may have brought the physical world into existence as its First Cause, but the physical world operates on its own without any direct action by God. This thinking is already in Descartes' thought about God, as we saw above. Malebranche stated this explicitly when he said that "[i]t seems to me quite certain that the will of spiritual beings is incapable of moving the smallest body in the world. It is evident, for example, that there is no necessary connection between our will to move our arm and our arm's movement."⁵⁰ As such, no causal relationship between spirit and physical things can be allowed in thought and knowledge as a basic presupposition. Descartes' formulation of the mind-body problem created the conceptuality for asserting that God as Spirit cannot be deemed to act causally on material things. In Descartes'

⁴⁷ Kenny, *Rise of Modern Philosophy*, 3:58–59.

⁴⁸ Russell, *History*, 561, emphasis original.

⁴⁹ Searle, *Mind*, 31.

⁵⁰ Kenny, *Rise of Modern Philosophy*, 3:58.

thought, God and mind go together. The laws of nature are needed to govern “matter in motion” and the physical universe. God is needed to back up the laws of nature and cannot contradict them, but that is as far as God’s interaction with the physical universe goes. Descartes thought of the body—and by extension the natural world—as a “mechanism” that “even if no mind existed in it, ... [it] would still exhibit the same motions that are in it now.”⁵¹ John Searle puts the problem of deism this way: “It is often said, ‘The physical world is causally closed.’ That means that nothing outside the physical world can enter into the physical world and act causally.”⁵² In a Cartesian world the material universe is the object of pure mathematics⁵³ and operates exclusively on the basis of the laws of nature.⁵⁴ No matter how much Descartes needed a concept of “God” for epistemological purposes, his account of the mind-body problem precluded God from engaging in any direct action in the physical world as a matter of philosophical and scientific principle, worked out on the basis of logic and deductive reasoning.⁵⁵ God is in the picture for Descartes only as a philosophical principle that validates a scientific view of reality as the source of the laws of nature and mathematics.

In addition to the problem of deism, Descartes’ treatment of the mind-body problem has had other implications. One important implication involves metaphysical reductions in thought. Such metaphysical reductions have been worked out in terms of the category of either mind or body, to either metaphysical idealism or materialism. The term “reduction” here means all reality

⁵¹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 47.

⁵² Searle, *Mind*, 31.

⁵³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 40.

⁵⁴ Descartes, *Discourse*, 24. Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 64, relates how Descartes “regarded all natural phenomena as appearances produced by forms of matter in motion, so that every relationship between them could be described in terms of algebra and geometry.”

⁵⁵ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, chapter 3.

being reduced in thought and knowledge to one category of things or the other. Berkeley was a good example of metaphysical idealism, where he argued that all existence should be thought of in terms of idea.⁵⁶ Berkeley's contention was that nothing physical exists unless it is perceived by a mind. All things physical exist only in perception, in idea. Later in modernity, the reduction went the other way toward materialism, in which it is asserted that only matter exists.⁵⁷ Because of the prevalence of metaphysical materialism, the critique of modern philosophy and science that Speech Act Theory can provide will be directed toward materialism.

In light of the foregoing, it becomes evident that Descartes' formulation of the mind-body problem has serious and determinative implications for Christian theology, when modern idealism is taken as foundational for theology. His formulation results in the problem of deism, where God could not be conceived as having any causal interaction with the physical world. Deism rejects *a priori* any account of such interaction between God and the physical world as testified to by the Bible. Furthermore, the metaphysical reductions that result from Descartes' formulation of the mind-body problem pose problems for theology in either of two directions. On the one hand, the reduction of metaphysical idealism makes it difficult to account for how God could operate in and through physical things. On the other hand, the reduction to materialism reasons God out of existence entirely, as well as the soul, faith, the Holy Spirit, and spiritual life, things that are essential to Christianity. Descartes' treatment of the mind-body problem also leads to the fact-value split, causing a chasm and dichotomy between history and the transcendent and making it impossible to relate physical acts to values for knowledge and theology. This drives theology and values into subjectivity since, in Cartesian thought, the body

⁵⁶ Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy* (1912, repr. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), 23–25.

⁵⁷ Russell, *History*, 568.

and the physical are known and regulated by science alone. The physical is the domain of science. Values, God, and theology are rendered as merely subjective and private matters, matters of opinion that are unintelligible in the public square.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE IMPACTS OF DESCARTES' THOUGHT IN RELATION TO PUBLIC THEOLOGY, SUBJECTIVISM, AND SECULARISM

As stated in chapter one, this project arose out of an interest in understanding how the features, arguments, conclusions, and presuppositions of modern philosophy, as rooted in the thought of René Descartes, impact Christian theology. It was stated there that the impact of Descartes' thought on Christian theology can be accounted for in terms of public theology, subjectivism, and secularism, as well as with respect to the fact-value split as an operating presupposition of the modern outlook. Specific features and reasoning of Descartes' thought have been presented. The purpose of this chapter is to relate these specific features and reasoning to the impacts in theology that have been identified. In other words, the purpose of this chapter is to “connect some dots” in order to show that providing a way out of the foundationalism of modern philosophy for theology is an important undertaking, setting up the importance of Speech Act Theory for a critique of modern idealism in support of a taxonomy of the Gospel. Connecting these dots will also prepare for an evaluation of conservative theology in the interests of bringing to the surface for examination just how deeply the assumptions, structure, and features of modern idealism can shape and influence such theology. Consequently, we turn now to discussing how Descartes' thought gives rise to the issues of public theology, subjectivism, and secularism, as well as to the fact-value split, which issues have a profoundly negative impact in Christian theology and the life of the church.

Public Theology

As was discussed in chapter one above, public theology relates to the broader issue of the relationship between philosophy and theology. What is at stake is whether Christian theology

will be permitted to speak on its own terms in the public square. The immediate location of this question is academia. It has a broader location, however, due to the fact that academia has the power to teach people what to think and form epistemological structures and patterns. Academia, in other words, has the power to form and shape worldview and basic assumptions in approaching life. Hans Frei described the problem of public theology as whether there can be Christian self-description in academic theology. George Lindbeck spoke of this problem in terms of the distinction between intratextuality and extratextuality in reference to whether theologians will understand the biblical text according to philosophical or scientific frames of reference that are external to the text and brought critically to bear on it, or whether they will allow the text to speak for itself.

The Relationship Between Theology and Philosophy

Public theology involves the problem of foundationalism, where philosophy establishes the basic assumptions of what can count as knowledge and be regarded as meaningful and true. Foundationalism involves the relationship between philosophy and theology and already reflects a commitment that theology must be undertaken in terms that philosophy can accept. Rorty described this as philosophy adjudicating claims to knowledge because philosophy purports to have special insight into the human mind and how humans come to know anything.¹ Philosophy also claims to have special insight into how the world really works beneath “appearances.” Oswald Bayer explains foundationalism when he says that modern philosophy puts “[e]verything that exists ... under the pressure of having to justify itself, of always having to prove its right to exist.”² Theology must justify itself to philosophy on philosophy’s terms or theology must be

¹ Rorty, *Mirror of Nature*, 3.

² Bayer, *Contemporary in Dissent*, 130.

silent in the public square. William Placher captures the problem of foundationalism in a working definition of “public theology” when he says that it requires claims to be grounded “in evidence and warrants acceptable to any intelligent, rational, responsible person.”³ What the educated, intelligent, rational person could regard as true provides the limits and the benchmark for what could be asserted as knowledge in theology.

That public theology involves the public square is captured by the word “public.” Hans Frei discussed this point in the context of the public university with respect to academic theology. The issue of public theology would not arise if there were no limitations imposed on Christian self-description in academia. Frei explained, however, that the modern university set terms of admission and those terms involved accepted assumptions about what can count as knowledge. Such assumptions would be provided by philosophy and science, a total, systematic view of things, which Frei tries to capture with the German word *wissenschaft*. An expectation is then created that extends to society as a whole as to what unifies society and constitutes society’s basic assumptions about what can count as knowledge, truth, and morality. Christians, churches, ministers, and theologians are expected to play along. Anything from Christianity’s own sources that does not agree with the accepted systematic view of things gets marginalized or pushed off into a private realm of personal opinion. The unity provided by philosophy and science can be enforced in educational settings, through civil law and governmental bureaucracies, and through social pressure that is brought about by the educational system affecting how people think. Any specific claims from Christian tradition and Christian self-description that are contrary to accepted philosophy and science are expected to yield in the public square.

The precise question relating to Descartes is just how modern philosophy gives rise to the

³ Placher, “Revisionist and Postliberal Theologies,” 395.

problem of public theology. The specific focus is on how Descartes' thought relates to the relationship between philosophy and theology because Descartes fundamentally altered this relationship. He did so in a two-fold movement.⁴ On the one hand, his thought involved a negative disavowal of any knowledge that he had received from any prior authority—including theology—that was external to his own mind, where his own mind was operating according to the dictates of what he understood as universal reason. On the other hand, his thought involved the positive affirmation at the same time of the absoluteness and universality of human reason.

How Descartes fundamentally altered the relationship between theology and philosophy began with his quest for certainty. Descartes was pursuing indubitably certain knowledge. He was pursuing this because he thought that knowledge he had received from tradition, his education, and his cultural was faulty. Former opinions, prejudices, tradition, or any other authority can only be regarded as providing actual knowledge when they are reconciled “to the norms of reason.”⁵ Descartes purported to disregard *all* authority and tradition, including the Christian tradition. It is striking just how absolute and all-encompassing he intended this “all” to be, as he said that “[m]y plan has never gone beyond trying to reform my own thoughts and building upon a foundation *which is completely my own*.”⁶ Accordingly he razed *all* prior

⁴ The analysis provided here looks only at Descartes' methodology and contentions. There is also an important sociological and historical aspect as to how Descartes was able to fundamentally alter the relationship of philosophy to theology that this project does not attempt to answer. The sociological and historical aspects reflect the phenomenon that no matter what Descartes actually argued, he could not have fundamentally altered the relationship between philosophy and theology if his arguments had not been widely accepted over time among thinkers and academics. There were important social and historical reasons not discussed here as to why his thought was accepted and then built upon and interacted with in terms of basic assumptions, or in terms of establishing the parameters of the conversation. One of the basic assumptions that was widely accepted was Descartes' stance toward tradition and any authority external to reason. It seems that thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries really wanted to take that stance.

⁵ Descartes, *Discourse*, 8.

⁶ Descartes, *Discourse*, 9, emphasis added.

knowledge to the ground in order to “begin again from the original foundations.”⁷ He thought that he needed to do so if he “wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences.”⁸ It is evident, therefore, that the purpose of Descartes’ enterprise was not to bolster Christian theology but the sciences. If Christian theology was in the way, it had to be swept aside. As Stout told us, Descartes reversed the order of the relationship of theology to philosophy that had held sway in the Middle Ages and made theology subject to philosophy.⁹

The reader should not be misled, therefore, by Descartes’ arguments for the existence of “God.” Descartes did not argue for the existence of God to support and defend Christian theology. He needed a concept of “God” for purposes of philosophical epistemology and science, and that was all. His concept of “God” was secular. Indeed, his argument for the existence of God actually exacerbates the problem of public theology because he made that concept subject to and depend upon reason uninformed by the Christian tradition, most especially the Scriptures. Descartes set out to prove God’s existence on the basis of reason alone, that is, on the basis of philosophy, as he said: “I have always thought that two issues—namely, God and the soul—are chief among those that ought to be demonstrated with the aid of philosophy rather than theology.”¹⁰

When it comes to the problem of public theology, Descartes’ thought was not what it might seem. A person may think that Descartes was engaged in a genuine task of defending the Christian faith when he argued for the existence of God; that Descartes was really engaged in Christian apologetics. He did think of himself as trying to prove the existence of God to the

⁷ Descartes, *Meditations*, 9.

⁸ Descartes, *Meditations*, 9.

⁹ Stout, *Flight from Authority*, 109.

¹⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 1.

unbeliever. But he was doing that in the interests of philosophical epistemology and science because his purpose for God extended to providing an epistemological grounding for science not the Christian faith. He produced a concept of “God” that was inherently deistic. His concept of “God” cannot support the Gospel of Christ, but actually works against it, because Descartes’ philosophy cannot account for God’s action in physical reality in contradiction of the laws of nature. Jesus Christ in His person and actions cannot be comprehended in a Cartesian scheme, as is evident from the way modern theology has criticized the Scriptures and the person of Christ on the basis of modern philosophy and science and re-worked Christian theology accordingly.

In light of Descartes’ apparent effort to prove the existence of God to the unbeliever, Placher cautions about how apologetics can lead to a distortion of the Christian faith in a concession to the dominance of philosophy and culture over theology and the church, when he states:

Christian apologists can adopt the language and assumptions of their audience so thoroughly that they no longer speak with a distinctively Christian voice. As a result, they not only cease to give a faithful account of the Christian tradition, they cease to be interesting to their non-Christian listeners because they do not seem to have anything new or different to say.... Contemporary Christian theology often seems to adopt such an ‘apologetic’ tone. Perhaps one reason is that ever since the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century, many forces in our culture have taught that ‘being rational’ meant questioning all inherited assumptions and then accepting only those beliefs which could be proven according to universally acceptable criteria. ‘Tradition’ and ‘authority’ were bad words.... Those Enlightenment ideals remain strong today.¹¹

The adoption of universally acceptable criteria in the interests of apologetics can be seen in such prominent modern theologians as Friedrich Schleiermacher, who thought he was engaging in apologetics in part in forming his understanding of the Christian faith.¹² Unfortunately, this same

¹¹ William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 11.

¹² Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 4–5, where he introduced the importance of apologetics to the theological

problem will arise in Carl Henry, as an example of conservative theology, who claimed that universal reason is the instrument for recognizing *divine* revelation and who could not thereby avoid special revelation in Christ becoming absorbed, distorted, and obfuscated in a concept of general revelation that universal reason can comprehend.¹³

The point is that Descartes adopted the canons of reason so thoroughly, as he understood those canons to be, that he produced a distorted view of God and made philosophy dominate theology. The adoption of Descartes' program, therefore, inherently brings with it the dominance of philosophy over theology and the problem of foundationalism. He established the rules of the game ever since, that theology must, in some way, answer the claims and demands of philosophy (and science) in order to be legitimate. When theology "plays the game" according to Descartes' rules, it can be difficult for Christian theology and the Christian church to speak in its own voice as shaped by its own tradition according to Christian self-description.

As Descartes swept aside all prior tradition, he filled the void with reason alone. Accepted knowledge would come from reason operating independently and autonomously. He was "hoping that those who use only their natural reason in all its purity [would] judge [his] opinions better than those who believe only in old books."¹⁴ Descartes argued that the existence of God should be established by philosophy using reason alone, as we have seen.¹⁵ In that contention he took the existence of God and knowledge of God away from theology and gave it to philosophy. He could not have altered the relationship between theology and philosophy any more

task. Unfortunately, however, in adopting the assumptions and constraints on knowledge required by reason and modern philosophy in the apologetic task, Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 418, denied any relevance to theology of the physical resurrection of Christ.

¹³ See chapter seven below.

¹⁴ Descartes, *Discourse*, 43.

¹⁵ Descartes, *Meditations*, 1.

fundamentally. This leads Ronald Thiemann to explain that “rational demonstration to those without faith [became] not an adjunct to the theological task but ... its replacement.”¹⁶ Thiemann explains further that knowledge of God in modernity became “a dependent belief which must be justified in relation to new basic convictions independent of the Christian faith.”¹⁷ Tracy expresses the reality described by Thiemann when he states that

in principle, the fundamental loyalty of the theologian *qua* theologian is to that morality of scientific knowledge which he shares with his colleagues, the philosophers, historians, and social scientists. No more than they, can he allow his own—or his tradition’s—beliefs serve as warrants for his arguments. In fact, in all properly theological inquiry, the analysis should be characterized by those same ethical stances of autonomous judgment, critical reflection, and properly skeptical hard-mindedness that characterize analysis in other fields.¹⁸

In order to enter the public square, the Christian theologian, the church, and its ministers must abandon Christian self-description and operate on the terms set by philosophy and science. Theology must answer to “evidence and warrants acceptable to any intelligent, rational, responsible person.” Bayer provides a description of how public theology works in relation to modern philosophy when he reflects on Johann Georg Hamann’s (d. 1788) contention that modern philosophy causes a “divorce” between spirit and matter, when he states:

In his *Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum*, appearing in 1783, Mendelssohn had plied Reimarus’ art of divorce and correspondingly separated the historical-positive from rational-natural religion. The ‘eternal truths about God and his government and providence, without which man cannot be enlightened and happy,’ are not ‘made known through *word* and *script*, which are intelligible only *here and now*,’ but are ‘revealed ... to all rational creatures through *things* and *concepts*, and inscribed in the soul with a script that is legible and comprehensible at all times and in all places.’¹⁹

¹⁶ Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 12.

¹⁷ Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, 12.

¹⁸ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 7.

¹⁹ Bayer, *Contemporary in Dissent*, 143–44, emphasis original.

On Descartes' terms there is no room for biblical authority and Christian self-description in academia and public life. Reason alone as unconstrained by tradition and authority became the ultimate standard and guiding light.

Public Theology Stems from Universal Reason

Public theology follows from Descartes' quest for indubitably certain knowledge based on reason alone because reason for Descartes was assumed to have an explicit universality. He intended to provide "a method for solving *all sorts of problems in the sciences*."²⁰ He was trying to find a foundation for knowledge that would pertain to *any* discipline or area of thought. He was seeking universal explication where everything could be accounted for under one theory or methodology. Reason could unify society precisely because it is universal. Everyone has it and can, theoretically, exercise it—if they have the "right" training and indoctrination.²¹ The principles of the sciences "must all be derived from philosophy."²² His philosophy would provide the foundation for knowledge in any field.

Descartes' basic posture, therefore, entails that theology and the church must answer to philosophy, culture, and the authorities of the prevailing philosophy and science as a matter of pre-determined principle. This posture of the relationship of philosophy to theology where philosophy and science rule absolutely is intrinsic to the modern outlook, and this posture

²⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 2, emphasis added.

²¹ See footnote 23, below, regarding Richard Rorty's view of education in relation to Christianity in the American university.

²² Descartes, *Discourse*, 13. Descartes, *Meditations*, 40, states that "I see plainly that the certainty and truth of every science depends exclusively upon the knowledge of the true God, to the extent that, prior to my becoming aware of him, I was incapable of achieving perfect knowledge about anything else. But now it is possible for me to achieve full and certain knowledge about countless things, both about God and other intellectual matters, as well as about the entirety of that corporeal nature which is the object of pure mathematics."

endures into the present in American academia.²³

An important question arises as to how foundationalism can be addressed with respect to Descartes' contentions. One way is to take Descartes to task with respect to his prejudice against tradition and culture. This has been done in their own ways by Nancey Murphy (referring to a web of beliefs),²⁴ Jeffrey Stout (arguing for historical philosophy),²⁵ and Alasdair MacIntyre (providing an analysis of emotivism and discussion of practices based on Aristotelean philosophy).²⁶ Another way is to argue for room for Christian self-description on the basis of pluralism as William Placher does.²⁷ Yet another way is to attack Descartes' *cogito* as Kenney and Seigel do above. The force of Kenney's and Seigel's argument is to show that the kind of reason that Descartes postulated does not exist, meaning, that tradition, culture, and authorities other than reason are vitally important in the development of reason. This is reflected in

²³ Richard Rorty, "Universality and Truth," in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. by Robert B. Brandom (Blackwell, 2000), 22, provides a rather caustic example of this when he asserts in the context of university education in America that "[t]here are credentials for admission to our democratic society, credentials which we liberals have been making more stringent by doing our best to *excommunicate* racists, male chauvinists, homophobes, and the like. You have to be *educated* in order to be a citizen of our society, a participant in our conversation, someone with whom we can envisage merging our horizons. So we are going to go right on trying to discredit you [i.e., a hypothetical "fundamentalist" Christian parent] in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your views seem silly rather than discussable. We are not so inclusivist as to tolerate intolerance such as yours [emphasis added]" Jürgen Habermas, "Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn," in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. by Robert B. Brandom (Blackwell, 2000), 51, takes issue with Rorty by stating that "[a]s soon as the concept of truth is eliminated in favor of a context-dependent epistemic validity-for-us, the normative reference point necessary to explain why a proponent should endeavor to seek agreement for '*p*' *beyond the boundaries of her own group* is missing [emphasis original]." Habermas, "Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn," 52, goes on to comment that "Rorty uses a jargon that no longer permits any differentiation between the perspectives of the participant and the observer. Interpersonal relationships, which are owed to the intersubjective possession of a shared language, are assimilated to the pattern of adaptive behavior or instrumental action. A corresponding de-differentiation between the strategic and the nonstrategic use of language, between action oriented toward success and action oriented toward reaching understanding, robs Rorty of the conceptual means for doing justice to the intuitive distinction between convincing and persuading, between motivation through reasons and causal exertion of influence, between learning and indoctrination." And so even though Rorty claims to eschew foundationalism, it appears that Christian self-description has no place in Rorty's democratic society.

²⁴ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 88–89.

²⁵ Stout, *Flight from Authority*, 6–7, 15.

²⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 11–12, 185–88.

²⁷ Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, 13, 17.

modernity itself in the sense that its outlook must be taught. Another way is to show that the universality of the assumptions of modern idealism and the absoluteness of science, as the arbiter of how the world works, can be called into question and relativized by their failure to account for phenomena that human beings engage in on a daily basis that cannot reasonably be denied. This way of critiquing the hegemony of modern idealism and science can be done pursuant to Searle's development of Speech Act Theory, with the result that his development of Speech Act Theory can be used in certain ways to make room for Christian self-description.

Subjectivism

A central contention of this project is that philosophy in the Cartesian-Kantian trajectory is subjective in its epistemology and leads to subjectivism as a worldview, which dominates the landscape in America today. When subjectivism functions as a worldview a person does not affirm anything in terms of morality, faith, and what exists on the basis of any source external to one's own mind (and heart or feeling). When modern idealism is accepted in a foundational manner, it produces subjectivism in theology, as well as in matters relating to doctrine, faith, Christian life, and the church. Subjectivism follows from how Descartes swept away any other way of knowing and any other source of knowledge in favor of what he would generate out of autonomous reason. Whatever way of knowing he would generate would become the way of knowing in a new worldview. Rorty explained this quite aptly when he said that in modernity "philosophy became, for the intellectuals, a substitute for religion. It was the area of culture where one touched bottom, where one found the vocabulary and the convictions which permitted one to explain and justify one's activity *as* an intellectual, and thus to discover the significance

of one's life."²⁸

Modern philosophy's subjective way of knowing works in an inside-out manner. The terminology of "inside-out" or "outside-in" implies an epistemic relationship when it comes to knowing something. These descriptive terms couch the relationship in terms of placing the human knowing subject in relation to anything external to it, whether God, other human beings, one's body, society, and the physical world. The inside-out terminology captures the thought that the ego is *not* shaped, formed, corrected, or taught by any external factor whatsoever. Rather, what the ego thinks, feels, and wills within independently of any external factor is taken to be the truth. What is claimed to be known arises out of the ego without influence, theoretically, from any factor external to the ego, even the person's own body, especially as the body in modern idealism is not regarded as constituting part of one's real self. This way of knowing is set forth in Descartes' doctrine of the *cogito* and the RTP.

This inside-out way of knowing has serious and thoroughgoing implications. It establishes the ego as the highest authority. It devalues the place of community and human tradition as a source of knowledge that is important for good and healthy human existence. Devaluing community is a serious and detrimental consequence because community involves a shared world of sense perception and values for which Descartes' doctrine cannot account. In a community, the ego is not autonomous, a law unto itself. This assertion is not intended to imply an absolute, totalitarian, cultural determinism as a solution to the problem of the *cogito*, which would be an opposite and horrible mistake. But it is intended to relativize the ego as the absolute source of knowledge and place it in a positive and humble relation to external sources of knowledge. Accounting for a shared world involves accounting for a shared language, cultural

²⁸ Rorty, *Mirror of Nature*, 4, emphasis original.

and societal experiences, and human institutions; institutions that are an objective, given, accepted, and intrinsically relied upon factor of human life every day.

Identifying “authority” as an epistemological issue has to do with what a person looks to as the determinative point of reference for answering questions relating to knowledge, faith, what exists, and morals. It involves what one looks to as the source that answers such questions for a person with finality and with ultimate power, such that when a person has the answer from that source, the person says, “that’s it, that’s how it is, and that’s final.” Such authority then leads to either affirmation and trust (i.e., faith), or a course of action relating to morals and ethics.

Paul Guyer and Rolf-Peter Horstmann capture the inside-out way of knowing of modern idealism when they explain that “everything that we can know about mind-independent ‘reality’ is held to be so permeated by the creative, formative, or constructive activities of the mind...that all claims to knowledge must be considered, in some sense, to be a form of self-knowledge.”²⁹ If to know the world is to know oneself, then the way of knowing is subjective. Searle affirms this when he states that in modern idealism “*reality is constituted* by our perceptions and other sorts of representations. Instead of thinking of our claims to knowledge as being answerable to an independently existing reality, we make reality answerable to our own representations.”³⁰ Searle’s way of describing a subjective epistemology is helpful. A way of knowing is subjective when it is thought that reality is constituted by and must answer to our perceptions and representations of it. The way of knowing is subjective when reality, whatever the particular reality immediately in view is, must answer to one’s claims to knowledge, rather than the other way around. Is there an independently existing reality that is what it is and ordered and full of

²⁹ Paul Guyer and Rolf-Peter Horstmann, “Idealism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2015, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/idealism>.

³⁰ Searle, *Mind, Language and Society*, 16, emphasis added.

knowledge to be discovered irrespective of the human knowing subject (a mind-independent reality), or is it possible to assert that something exists only if the human mind can know it exists (mind-dependent reality)? In modern idealism, reality is mind-dependent. As Leen Spruit explains, Descartes' asserted that "nothing is received from the senses that was not first in the intellect."³¹ Kant affirms this epistemology when he calls the mind "the lawgiver of nature" and contends that "the order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle *nature*, we ourselves introduce."³² Modern idealism is subjective.

Descartes argued for mind-dependent reality in his thought experiment with the wax. The secondary qualities of the wax, which the senses perceive, change, while the substance of the wax remains, whatever that is. Therefore, he concluded, that "the *perception* of the wax is neither a seeing, nor a touching, nor an imagining. Nor has it ever been, even though it previously seemed so," but it is "an inspection on the part of the mind alone."³³ Only the mind perceives what the wax really is, which does not consist of anything about the wax that is presented to the senses. By extension, all reality is only what the mind perceives it to be, and the mind is somehow able to do this pursuant to its own peculiar constitution. So the way of knowing established by Descartes is inside-out, reality having to answer to the human knowing subject rather than the other way around. The issue of sense perception is central to this because it is via sense perception that a person has direct access to the external world. The problem for this view for theology is it makes a person unable to recognize as authoritative God acting through speech and physical action.

Because modern idealism's way of knowing is subjective, modern idealism leads to

³¹ Spruit, *Species Intelligibilis*, 2:388.

³² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 147.

³³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 17, emphasis added.

subjectivism with respect to the issue of authority and being able to account for having a shared world. This becomes evident with respect to how Descartes placed the *cogito* at the center of all things. James Edwards poignantly captures the subjectivism of Descartes' thought, when he states:

The indubitable center of (self)-consciousness ... is the ego, and as a result of Descartes's skeptical maneuvers in relation to our ordinary sources of belief, all is now doubtful except the ego in its immediate self-presentation. Only in the ego's self-consciousness of itself as [a thinking thing] is there certainty: the full identity of Thought and Being.... *The ego thus becomes the subject ... the fixed and identity-granting ground of all other reality....* Everything else takes its determinate identity, its true Being, in relation to this ego-subject, as one of its 'objects.' *The epistemically privileged ego, not the Christian God or the Platonic Form of the Good, has become the first and founding link in Being's great chain.*³⁴

When the human mind becomes the ground of all other reality and the ego determines what exists in reference to itself, the ego becomes its own authority. It becomes autonomous in its self-conception. This can become a notion of freedom. As MacIntyre puts it, modern philosophy gives way to individual autonomous self-assertion under the power of its own presuppositions.³⁵ "Emotivism" results in the fields of morality, moral discourse, and public policy and politics, and renders "moral judgments [as] *nothing but* expressions of preference, ... attitude or feeling."³⁶ It makes "anyone and everyone ... a moral agent, since it is in the self and not in social roles or practices that moral agency has to be located."³⁷ The "emotivist self" has no ultimate criteria, other than itself.³⁸ It should not be surprising that rank and file American Christians could be sorely pressured to operate in a similarly subjective fashion since they live and work in an

³⁴ Edwards, *Plain Sense of Things*, 28–29, emphasis added.

³⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 33–34.

³⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 11–12, emphasis original.

³⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 32.

³⁸ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 33.

“emotivist” culture, at least with respect to philosophical conceptions of the self and epistemology.

Oswald Bayer similarly explains modern philosophy’s subjectivism in its conception of the power of the human ego when he says that

[i]n their critical reason humans are aware that they are the creatures who can stand the things of the world on their head, can arrange them in freedom according to rational reflection. The world must be directed according to their notion.... Humans are not subject to their drives and passions, their inclinations, or to positive laws, custom, and convention. They can think of everything that exists in a different way. ... [I]n thought they can venture the experiment of an ... annihilation of the world. In this experiment they can call the existence of everything back to nothing and from this nothing think everything anew. In this way humans can allow things to succeed each other in a way different from nature and produce what is new after their own sketch.³⁹

When human beings are taught by an epistemology to “think everything anew” and “produce what is new after their own sketch,” they have been taught subjectivism. Georg Hegel reflected such subjectivism in his discussion of history and the task of the historian when he contended that “[o]riginal historians ... transform the events, actions, and situations presented to them into a work of representative thought.”⁴⁰ Thus he regards history as mind-dependent and as reflecting what the human mind wants it to be.

Subjectivism also comes into view with Descartes’ thinking about the human will. We saw above how Descartes made some powerful statements about the will. Accordingly, we also saw above how Nietzsche thought that Descartes’ quest for certainty was determined by the will since the will must decide among the many ideas before the mind. This seems to suggest that knowledge consists of choosing among propositions, which is not a function of the intellect but of the will. If later philosophical thought removes the reliability of reason from the

³⁹ Bayer, *Contemporary in Dissent*, 131.

⁴⁰ Hegel, *Reason in History*, 4.

Cartesian-Kantian scheme, the will in the Cartesian scheme remains, a will liberated from tradition, culture, and one's body. It should also not be surprising if the will could also be conceived of as liberated from social convention and law on the basis of Descartes' rejection of any external authority. When the will is so liberated, autonomous self-assertion remains and moves to the center. The picture of the modern human being that remains is willful self assertion. Subjectivism manifests itself in the will to power. This may be an apt description of the nature of the social, cultural, and political landscape of America today. Is it also an apt description of American spirituality?

Modern philosophy also leads to subjectivism because it does not provide a theoretical framework for accounting for a shared world. This fact arises from Descartes' theorizing about the RTP and his split between secondary qualities and the essence of things. Subjectivism arises from the RTP due to Descartes' concept of "idea" and his sloughing secondary qualities off into the subjectivity of the observer. Auyang describes how Descartes' concept of "idea" cuts the mind off from any epistemological relationship with the external world in a "*mind-world dichotomy*, which introduces an inner mental realm that is isolated from the outside physical universe."⁴¹ The RTP traps the ego in a solipsistic subjectivity behind a "veil of ideas" that drops between the mind and the world. Sloughing off secondary qualities into the knowing subject also cuts the human mind off from external reality in the sense of being shaped by that reality. This "cutting-off" occurs because much of what we know and experience about the world comes through sense perception of secondary qualities that cannot be accounted for on the terms of forms of matter in motion.

Consequently, the RTP as a theory of sense perception at the center of Cartesian-Kantian

⁴¹ Auyang, *Mind*, 30, emphasis original.

epistemology cannot account for a shared world because it places ideas and secondary qualities in the knowing subject. If it is then asserted that those ideas do not correspond to the external world (or if there is no way to be sufficiently confident that they do), or if it is asserted that the secondary qualities have nothing to do with the essence of things, as Descartes and Kant assert, then multiple minds cannot have a shared experience of the world. Mortimer Adler explains that “[w]e call something objective when it is the same for me, for you, and for anyone else. We call something subjective when it differs from one individual to another and when it is exclusively the possession of one individual and no one else.”⁴² Ideas are in only one person’s head. The ideas I have in my head are not in someone else’s head.⁴³ If a theory of sense perception cannot account for ideas being accurately related to external objects, then, by virtue of the subjectivity of ideas, there is no way to account philosophically for two minds sharing a mind-independent reality. As Adler puts it, there would be no way to account philosophically for two human beings sitting around a table, having a glass of wine in a shared experience involving perceptual activity.⁴⁴ But such is the Cartesian view of “ideas” in relation to sense perception. On the terms of modern idealism, therefore, no two human beings could have a shared experience of Christ’s resurrection or a shared experience of faith in “hearing the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).

The Cartesian-Kantian theory of sense perception also leads to subjectivism with respect to the meaning of human speech pursuant to the old adage: “[I]f a tree falls in the woods and there is no human being around to hear it fall, does it make a sound.” Kant contends, based on the

⁴² Mortimer Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 9.

⁴³ Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, 11, explains that “[a]ll ideas are subjective. I have mine; you have yours; and they are never identical or common to us both.” His meaning here is that ideas are *ontologically* subjective, that is, that they exist in the mind.

⁴⁴ Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, 12.

RTP, that it does not make a sound.⁴⁵ There is no sound if there is no human being there to perceive it. Kant extends this contention to the meaning of human speech, where he says that “[t]o one man ... a certain word suggests one thing, to another some other thing.”⁴⁶ Terence Keegan applies Kant’s treatment of sense perception to hermeneutics in theology when he asserts that the meaning of human speech is analogous to the old adage about the tree falling in the woods. Like Kant, Keegan contends that the tree does not make a sound because “the very sensation of sound is something *created by the hearer*.”⁴⁷ This assertion is consistent with Kant’s contention that “appearances” do not exist in themselves “but only in us,” and that we know nothing of objects except “our mode of perceiving them.”⁴⁸ Accordingly, the meaning of language must also be created by the hearer.

If Keegan is correct or, that is to say, if Kant and Descartes are correct, then there is no way in philosophy to account for shared meaning of language. Language becomes utterly subjective. The meaning of language is what every hearer wants it to be. Auyang identifies how epistemological theories of the mind “fail to account for meaning, which resides in the intelligibility of the world,”⁴⁹ when they create a chasm between the mind and the physical

⁴⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 82, states, “What we have meant to say is that all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; that the things which we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them as being, nor their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us, and that if the [knowing] subject, or even ... the subjective constitution of the senses in general, be removed, the whole constitution and all the relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, *would vanish*. As appearances, they cannot exist in themselves, *but only in us*. What objects may be in themselves, ... apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility, remains completely unknown to us. We know *nothing* but our mode of perceiving them [emphasis added].” Kant is arguing that space, time, and causality are not things that exist independently of the mind as relations among objects in the external world. Rather, they are completely constructions of the human mind. Two minds could not then have a shared experience of anything that involves space, time, and causality if Kant is right.

⁴⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 158.

⁴⁷ Terence O. Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 79, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 82.

⁴⁹ Auyang, *Mind*, 30.

universe in a “veil of ideas.” In modern philosophy, meaning must be brought to the observation of physical phenomenon from somewhere other than the physical phenomenon itself because it is assumed that mind-independent reality has no intrinsic meaning. Meaning must be provided by the mind in a mind-dependent framework of reference. Such a frame of reference, however, cannot account for a shared world. It cannot account for community and the conventions and institutions woven into the fabric of human life and human community. Such a concept of meaning is subjective and leads to subjectivism.

Kant’s contention about the subjective meaning of language is false, however. We know this when two people are in a car together traveling down the road and one of them says: “Hey look at that deer over there in the field.” Then the other one says: “Oh yeah! look at that deer over there in the field.” The two people are sharing a common experience of seeing a deer in a field and communicating with each other about it in a shared language.

In fact, human beings live in a shared experience of the external world all the time, a shared experience that involves a shared meaning of language. These things are fundamental to human existence. Jürgen Habermas explains that “[r]eaching understanding cannot function unless the participants refer to a single objective world, thereby establishing the intersubjectively shared public space with which everything that is merely subjective can be contrasted.”⁵⁰ In addition, Donald Davidson contends that human beings operate with a concept of truth that connects them to the external world in an epistemically meaningful way.⁵¹ Similarly Searle

⁵⁰ Habermas, “Richard Rorty’s Pragmatic Turn,” 41.

⁵¹ Donald Davidson, “Truth Rehabilitated,” in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. by Robert B. Brandom (Blackwell, 2000), 72–73, states that “sentences are understood on condition that one has the concept of objective truth.... It is possible to have a belief only if one knows that beliefs may be true or false.... Truth enters into ...other attitudes in other ways. We desire that a certain state of affairs be true. We fear, hope or doubt that things are one way or another. We intend by our actions to make it true that we have a good sleep. We are proud or depressed that it is the case that we have won the second prize. Since all these, and many more attitudes have a propositional content—the

explains that “[i]f material objects are reducible to sense data, and the only sense data I have access to are my own sense data, then I could never communicate with you about a public material object.”⁵² Searle adds further that communication requires “publicly available meanings in a public language,” such that if I were to refer to “this table,” there would be a table out there to which my statement could possibly refer.⁵³ Such communication requires that we “share a perceptual access to one and the same object.”⁵⁴

Modern philosophy’s subjectivism is striking with respect to community when taken in contrast to passages of the NT such as Acts 2:42, Eph. 4:1–6, and Phil. 4:2.⁵⁵ What is striking in these passages is the unity expressed with respect to the church in realities that are trans-subjective and shared. It is difficult to see how the Apostle Paul could urge unity (Eph. 4:1–6; Phil. 4:2) without a worldview that admitted the possibility of a know-ably shared world.

Descartes’ view of the RTP, however, cannot account for such a shared world. As a result, it cannot account for community and the possibility of the ego being corrected through a mutually shared experience of an external world. It cannot account for correction of opinion relating to shared things within a community. It cannot account for a community being corrected

sort of content that can be expressed by a sentence ... [it] is necessary to know what it would be for the corresponding sentence to be true. Without a grasp of the concept of truth, not only language, but thought itself, is impossible.... Correspondence, while it is empty as a definition, does capture the thought that truth depends on how the world is, and this should be enough to discredit most epistemic and pragmatic theories.”

⁵² Searle, *Mind*, 275.

⁵³ Searle, *Mind*, 275–76.

⁵⁴ Searle, *Mind*, 276.

⁵⁵ Acts 2:42 states, in terms of the characterization of the Christian church immediately following the Day of Pentecost: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Ephesians 4:1–6 states, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Philippians 4:2 states, “I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.”

by a mind-independent reality, or by the word of God. It cannot account for humans having a shared language, by which they communicate with each other. It cannot account for humans having shared conventions like stop-and-go lights and institutions like money or Holy Communion that enable human society—including that society called the church—to function in fundamentally meaningful and vital ways to create faith, values, and beneficially regulated behavior. Descartes’ theorizing about the RTP cannot account for these things. Descartes’ way of knowing is subjective, and it leads to subjectivism. This is a perpetual problem as Auyang explains that “Cartesian ideas of a disembodied and solipsist mind whose characteristics are totally independent of the physical universe continue to be influential.”⁵⁶

The subjectivism of modern philosophy impacts Christian theology and church life. It shows itself in theology in Schleiermacher’s insistence that “the theses of faith must now become the ‘hypotheses of the theologian.’”⁵⁷ Cartesian philosophy operating foundationally leads the theologian to assert “what really happened” based on some frame of reference that is external to and critical of the original observer and biblical writer, and also contrary to the interests of the Christian community. Schleiermacher’s subjection of theology to the “hypotheses of the theologian” also fails to account for the theologian’s work being done in and for the church and leads to the theologian “lording it over the church” with his or her own opinion.

The subjectivism of modern philosophy is not only a problem for the theologian. It is also a problem for the laity, because subjectivism constitutes in large part the worldview that is absorbed by Christians in America by virtue of being part of a culture shaped by modern idealism. For the Christian, the theologian, and the church in the tradition of the Reformation, the

⁵⁶ Auyang, *Mind*, 30.

⁵⁷ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 27.

issue is whether there is a functioning way in which there can be formation and correction of faith, conduct, and practice by external factors, such as, the word of God, or, where the word of God is silent, by sound reasoning.

The subjectivism of modern thought shows itself in churches when people assert that something must be true, and that action must be taken on the basis of feeling or their own opinion contrary to the teaching of Scripture and the accepted doctrinal positions and practices of the church. The unspoken assumption is that the feeling and subjective opinion of the ego has an authority that can critique the Scriptures and call into question and reject accepted doctrine and practice. It seems that the individual Christian in American Protestantism, Lutheran churches included, are having an increasingly difficult time computing what it means for God's word and accepted doctrine and practice of the church to call into question the ego's opinion, feeling (or "what is in one's heart"), and will. The epistemology of modern idealism leads to viewing truth and practical decision making according to what feels good (meaning not only pleasure but also sentiment) and to thinking that what feels good is right.

The subjectivism of modern philosophy is a huge problem because it cannot account for how the Christian and theologian could be shaped by God's actions in external reality, speech, the Scriptures, accepted church tradition under the Scriptures, and sacrament and ritual. It precludes the ego from being shaped by such external operations due to its inside-out way of knowing. What Kierkegaard asserted seems to dominate the landscape of Protestantism in America: "The movement of the spirit is inward, that the truth is the subject's transformation in himself."⁵⁸ The issue posed by modern philosophy is whether the human ego suffers God's action or is the active subject and its own authority. Modern philosophy says the ego is the active

⁵⁸ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 38.

subject and its own authority.

The upshot of all this is to say that Descartes' development of the *cogito*, his basic assumptions regarding reason in contrast to external authority, and his development of the RTP, which endures in modern philosophical and scientific thought up to the present time, produce subjectivism. When modern philosophy becomes foundational for theology, the problems of subjectivism will inevitably emerge in theology and Christianity.

Secularism

Modern idealism also gives rise to secularism. "Secularism" as used here is taken to mean that God is functionally or practically irrelevant to the physical world and human life, that there is a complete disconnect between fact and value, and that God is assumed not to act in history and physical reality. There is no "miracle" such as the resurrection of Christ or the Holy Spirit working repentance and creating faith in the heart and mind of a person. There is no word of God, whether spoken or written. Human speech is *only* human speech and no more. God cannot be understood as an authority that actually directs what one believes and how one lives. God is not the determinative point of reference. Secularism is a result of Descartes' thought in his concept of "God" and by virtue of how the *cogito* leads to his treatment of the relationship between the mind and the body in the human being.

Descartes' Concept of "God" Leads to Secularism

Descartes' concept of God leads to secularism because it is inherently deistic. Descartes' "God" consists of a principle or epistemological solution that enables affirming the existence of the physical world and knowing and fixing its operations through mathematics in order to put the natural sciences on an indubitably certain epistemological foundation. His "God" is needed for science as the principle that establishes the laws of nature and makes possible reasoning from

effect to cause and understanding the essence of the physical universe through mathematics. The laws of nature and the principles and reasoning of mathematics then govern the physical universe absolutely. God may have been a first cause of it all, God may be an underlying philosophical principle that, in logic, is needed to establish the laws of nature and the validity of mathematics, but the physical universe operates on its own. In a Cartesian world the material universe is the object of pure mathematics⁵⁹ and operates exclusively on the basis of the laws of nature.⁶⁰ This is deism. Deism leads to secularism because Descartes' "God" is relegated to being a First Cause that does not otherwise interact with the physical world and in the lives of human beings. Descartes provides, therefore, an inherently deistic and secular view of God. Descartes' view cannot accommodate God's action in physical reality in Jesus and in anything Jesus did and instituted. Bultmann gave expression to this secularism in his comments about the resurrection and the impossibility of conceiving how the Spirit of God could act causally in a human soul.⁶¹

As such, Descartes' "God" has little to do with the God of Christian theology who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 6:4; Gal. 1:1). It also has little to do with either the Law or the Gospel, since Descartes' "God," as a philosophical concept that provides epistemological guarantees for science, does not demand or promise anything. Indeed Descartes' "God" cannot do so. There can be no means of grace with Descartes' "God." Descartes' "God" is a philosophical and rational principle. Descartes' "God" does not enter into relation with us and cannot act within the physical world for purposes of revelation, judgment, or salvation. Descartes' idea of God, therefore, is foreign to a taxonomy of

⁵⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 40.

⁶⁰ Descartes, *Discourse*, 24. Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 64, relates how Descartes "regarded all natural phenomena as appearances produced by forms of matter in motion, so that every relationship between them could be described in terms of algebra and geometry."

⁶¹ Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 6, 7.

the Gospel.

Descartes' Treatment of the Mind-Body Problem Leads to Secularism

Descartes' treatment of the mind-body problem also gives rise to secularism in a number of ways. By using logical reasoning in a deterministic way⁶² in reaching the *cogito*, Descartes determined that the essence of the human being is mind alone, as utterly distinct from the body. That logical conclusion creates the problem for thought as to how the mind and the body can interact with each other in a casual way.⁶³ The result is that there can be no causal relationship in thought between spirit and physical things as a matter of pre-determined principle, as a presupposition. In a Cartesian world the material universe is the object of pure mathematics⁶⁴ and operates exclusively on the basis of the laws of nature.⁶⁵ This is deism, and it leads to secularism. Secularism lies deep in the roots of the modern age because it lies deep in Descartes' philosophy.

The inherent deism and secularism in modern philosophy has profound and far-reaching implications for Christian theology. When modern philosophy operates foundationally in theology, there can be no incarnation and resurrection. Christ's death could not be an atoning sacrifice. There can be no inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit and no operation of the Holy Spirit in the human being. All of these implications for theology follow as predetermined philosophical commitment or presupposition.

⁶² What is meant here by the phrase "using logical reasoning in a deterministic way" is following the dictates of logical reasoning whether or not its conclusions actually agree with the way things are in the world. Indeed, in using logical reasoning in a deterministic way, it is assumed that reality will be whatever the conclusions of logical reasoning say it is.

⁶³ See pages 113–15 above.

⁶⁴ Descartes, *Meditations*, 40.

⁶⁵ Descartes, *Discourse*, 24. Seigel, *Idea of the Self*, 64, relates how Descartes "regarded all natural phenomena as appearances produced by forms of matter in motion, so that every relationship between them could be described in terms of algebra and geometry."

When Descartes drove a wedge between mind and body, he also created the bifurcation known as the fact-value split. The fact-value split has far-reaching epistemological implications for faith and value. In Descartes' treatment of mind and body, the body, which corresponds to the physical universe, is entirely governed by the laws of nature that find expression in the natural sciences. The purpose of epistemology was to ground the sciences in determining the essence of things as forms of matter in motion. Epistemology could not, therefore, account for values, faith, and morals in such a scheme. In the fact-value split, therefore, no knowledge of the physical nature of things could have any relation to a value judgment. The fact-value split makes it impossible to affirm a connection between the physical occurrence of Christ's resurrection and the forgiveness of sins or theology. Thus, the fact-value split undergirds the dichotomy between the "Jesus of history" and "Christ of faith" which Lessing held when he asserted that no factual circumstance could give rise to "universal truths of reason."⁶⁶ Thus, no factual occurrence with respect to Jesus Christ could give rise to any value or relational factor such as the forgiveness of sins. The resurrection of Christ could not have any theological implications whether about Christ Himself or about God.

The fact-value split can be stated in terms of whether it is possible in thought to account for moving from an "is" to an "ought," that is, from a fact to a value. Richard Bernstein explains that Kant made a "rigorous distinction between the Is and the categorical Ought," and he assumed that he could not find an objective moral law empirically, that is, through observation of the way things are or of anything physical. Kant thought that he could only find this objective moral law through a process of logical reasoning operating independently of sense perception.⁶⁷ Moreover,

⁶⁶ Lessing, "On the Proof of Spirit and of Power," 53.

⁶⁷ Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 13. Bayer, *Theology*, 13, reflecting on Semler and Bultmann, states: "The disjunction between the historical emphasis in theology, on the one hand, and the moral or

the fact-value split operated well into the twentieth century in logical positivism, where, according to A. J. Ayer, statements pertaining to moral judgements, or the soul, or God, could not be verifiable as true or false and were, therefore, a matter of subjective opinion. They contain no matter of fact and are not verifiable by observation.⁶⁸ The inability to account for moving from an “is” to an “ought” rests on Descartes’ commitment to forms of matter in motion as involving the essence of things and the mind-body split. Descartes, thereby, created a split between mind and body, between fact and value, and between private and public life based on science that has permeated modern thought and modern life and society ever since.⁶⁹

Descartes’ treatment of the mind-body problem also contributes to secularism in another way. This way has to do with metaphysical reductions. Think of a reduction as “putting all of one’s eggs in one basket,” as the saying goes. A reduction can start out in the positing of an either/or, which then advances to choosing one side or term of the either/or and making it everything. In Descartes’ thought, mind and body are on opposite sides of an either/or that categorizes all reality. Logical reasoning cannot allow for a causal interaction between the mind and body. In other words, the chasm of this either/or cannot be bridged in logical thought. Logic requires that what exists be construed in terms of one side or another of the either/or. Thinkers in the history of modern philosophy that were closer to Descartes favored resolving this either/or on the side of mind, such that, only that which can be construed in terms of idea exists. This view is

existential, on the other, belongs to a tradition that reaches from Semler to Bultmann. This is a strong and consistent feature, especially in the work of Immanuel Kant, who ultimately reduces the Christian faith to a code of ethics. In direct opposition to philological criticism and ancient scholarship, which always emphasize the empirical and historical side of theology and therefore what is *a posteriori*, [Kant] gives precedence to the moral *a priori* side.”

⁶⁸ A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952), 107, 116, 126.

⁶⁹ In their preface in Bayer, *Theology*, ix, Mark Mattes and Jeffrey Silcock refer to these bifurcations this way: “[Bayer’s thinking] convincingly demonstrates that the modern split between theory and practice—along with the other bifurcations of post-Enlightenment rationalism, such as the antithesis of public and private, inner and outer, theological scholarship and church spirituality—is foreign to the Reformation as well [as] to the scriptures, and misrepresents the nature of Lutheran theology.”

metaphysical idealism.⁷⁰ George Berkeley provides an example of metaphysical idealism because he asserted that the only way something exists is when it is perceived as an idea.⁷¹ Later in the history of modern thought, the either/or was resolved by logic in favor of the body, that is, in favor of matter. This resolution is metaphysical materialism. The only thing that exists is matter. There is no spirit nor soul.

Searle contends that most people in academia today are metaphysical materialists, that is, “[t]hey do not believe there is such a thing as consciousness ‘over and above’ the physical features of the physical world.”⁷² Searle explains further that the most extreme version of materialism asserts that “mental states, as such, don’t exist at all.”⁷³ Searle refers to materialists who hold this view as “eliminative materialists.” In the conception of eliminative materialists, “there really aren’t any such things as beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, etc.”⁷⁴

It is obvious that materialism leads to secularism. If God does not exist at all, as materialism asserts, then God would be completely irrelevant to the functioning of the universe and to human life. Descartes’ treatment of the mind-body problem set the stage in later philosophy for secularism based on materialism. Kant’s denial that God’s existence could be proved by reason further facilitated the reduction to materialism. What if, however, Descartes’ treatment of the mind-body problem fails to account for our human experience of language that cannot be reasonably or rationally denied, and that the experience of language contravenes the

⁷⁰ It can be confusing, but metaphysical idealism is not to be confused with the epistemological idealism we have been exploring in Descartes’ and Kant’s way of knowing. There are materialists who accept Descartes’ thought about the RTP, while denying that ideas have any metaphysical status.

⁷¹ In Latin this is *esse est percipi*, which is “to exist is to be perceived.”

⁷² Searle, *Mind, Language and Society*, 46.

⁷³ John R. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 6.

⁷⁴ Searle, *Rediscovery of the Mind*, 6.

mind-body dichotomy? In that event, there would seem to be something very wrong with Descartes' philosophical reasoning, opening up a re-affirmation of Christ self-description. This is exactly what Speech Act Theory suggests and is why Speech Act Theory can be a powerful critique of modern philosophy in a manner that is helpful to Christian theology.

The Problem of Not Accounting for the Category of Relation and Human Institutions

In connection with the foregoing discussion of how Descartes' thought leads to secularism, Cartesian-Kantian thought also impacts human life and society because it cannot account for things that are more "relational" in nature, such as ethics, the Gospel, and human institutions. This is because Cartesian-Kantian thought is all about establishing an epistemology that can enable an understanding of what exists and how the world works through science. Their programs were aimed at providing philosophical grounding for knowing the essence of things in support of the then newly developing field of modern science. Thus, metaphysics became a primary concern of modern philosophy.

It is not surprising, therefore, that modern philosophy's preoccupation with metaphysics has dominated modern theology. Indeed, metaphysical questions have determined the subject matter of theology in modernity and have been thought of as decisive for distinguishing between liberal and conservative theologies. A liberal theologian characteristically would deny that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, and that he was raised from the dead, all for metaphysical reasons as determined by the presuppositions of modern thought. A conservative theologian characteristically would affirm all of these propositions, for a different set of metaphysical reasons put forward to meet the metaphysical objections of the "liberal." Both liberal and conservative theologians have been responding to the same question(s) raised by modernity and assuming that such questions were

the essential ones. Hans Frei explains that “modern theology took its cue from much of modern science and philosophy, and so became obsessed with the notion and discernment of true factuality. ‘Facticity,’ or ‘factuality,’ came to be a kind of a magic word, and theoreticians would clobber each other with it.”⁷⁵ In terms of being influenced foundationally by modern philosophy, both liberal and conservative theology can reflect that influence by this preoccupation with metaphysics, as if metaphysics were the only question that concerns Christian theology. In other words, both liberal and conservative theology can fail to account for the relational category in the Gospel in relation to redemption and faith and for how metaphysics relates to that category.

The point here is not to suggest that “facticity” and “metaphysics” do not have a place in Christian theology. They do. Rather, it is to argue that facticity and metaphysics can become a reduction in theology and permit theology to be played by the rules of modern philosophy at the cost of not being able to account for relational factors and human institutions that are vitally important to the Gospel and the Christian faith.⁷⁶ The problem is compounded by modern theology not being able to relate facticity to the relational factors and theology that are critically important to the Gospel. This is an especially acute problem for the conservative theologian who formally affirms the orthodox metaphysical assertions about God and Jesus Christ.

Where this reduction is evident in Christian theology, the fact-value split is operating. The

⁷⁵ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 14.

⁷⁶ In contrasting a Kantian view of reason with a view of reason held in the Middle Ages by Thomas Aquinas, William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1958), 26–27, states, “For Aquinas the whole natural world, and particularly this natural world as it opens toward God as First Cause, was transparently accessible to human reason; while to Kant, writing at the bitter end of the century of Enlightenment, the limits of human reason had very radically shrunk.... But this ‘unbounded rationalism’ of the medieval philosopher is altogether different from the untrammled use later thinkers made of human reason, applying it like an acid solvent to all things human or divine. The rationalism of the medieval philosophers was contained by the mysteries of faith and dogma, which were altogether beyond the grasp of human reason, but were nevertheless powerfully real and meaningful to man as symbols that kept the vital circuit open between reason and emotion, between the rational and non-rational in the human psyche. Hence, this rationalism of the medieval philosophers does not end with the attenuated, bleak, or grim picture of man we find in the modern rationalists.”

problem is that mere facticity, metaphysics in a modern sense, cannot account for a number of things that are essential to the Gospel. These things consist of reconciliation with God, the forgiveness of sins, the promises of God's presence with us in good times and bad, resurrection from the dead, eternal life, how God's word and action create faith, and how individuals and community relate to each other as church in relation to God. Even if one could "prove" the fact of the resurrection, a requirement brought about by modern idealism, an epistemology based on modern idealism does not provide modern theology the conceptuality to reach why the resurrection saves us and what difference it makes to Christian life. This is a problem for both liberal and conservative theology. Carl Henry as an American conservative theologian, for example, seems unable to tell us why the resurrection matters as he regards it as a "bizarre" and "brute" event that can provide no meaning to "cognitive claims."

Bertrand Russell provides insight into understanding why modern philosophy neglects relational factors in its preoccupation with knowing the essence of things by connecting this problem to a discussion of universals in relation to language. The question of universals has been perennial for much of Western philosophy since the ancient Greeks. Plato's theory of forms is the most famous doctrine of universals. Russell explained that modern Western philosophers had held that universals exist in the sense of subjects and adjectives but not in terms of verbs and prepositions.⁷⁷ Nouns and adjectives deal more with metaphysics. Verbs and prepositions deal more with relations. For example, a white ball with red threading (a baseball) can be a particular instance of ball-ness, while the verb "throwing," for example, has not been recognized in modern philosophy as an instance of the universal "to throw." The baseball has an essence that science can investigate as to its molecular structure and chemistry and how it is subject to the four forces

⁷⁷ Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, 65–68.

of nature. In that scientific quest, however, the baseball's qualities, use, and meaning related to its color and its being "thrown" become irrelevant, whereas such things are quite relevant for the institution of playing baseball. Moreover, how to play baseball in terms of how the game works is not subjective, that is, it cannot be relegated to the private sphere of the inner subjectivity of the human being as the fact-value split would require. Yet, a scientific analysis of a baseball cannot account for how the game works. Modern philosophy has denied that universals reflected by verbs and prepositions exist at all, while Russell contends that they exist just as much as the quality of ball-ness. The consequence is that modern philosophy cannot account for the relations and institutions involved if someone throws a baseball to another in the context of that game. Russell shows that both idealists and empiricists denied relations as universals, meaning that nearly the whole of modern Western philosophy had done so.⁷⁸

The category of relation not being accounted for in modern philosophy due to its fixation with the essence of things becomes a reduction and problematic in light of the existence of human institutions like the game of baseball. In the game of baseball, when someone throws the baseball something more than just metaphysics is taking place. This "something more" involves rules of conduct and value judgments, like being "out" at first base, that are directly related to the facts, such as, the ball beating the runner to first base. It also involves relations among the players and between the teams in terms of the short-stop throwing the ball to the first baseman to get an opposing player "out" and one team winning and the other losing. Reducing the baseball to its scientifically determined essence cannot account for these things. The game of baseball exists, but it cannot be accounted for by merely examining the metaphysical essence of the baseball. This analysis applies to more important institutions like economics and traffic

⁷⁸ Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, 65–68.

regulation that also cannot be accounted for where the only interest is the metaphysical essence of things. This analysis pertains also to institutions in the church by which God delivers the forgiveness of sins based on Christ's death and resurrection. All of these institutions come about in relation to verbs and prepositions.

Modern philosophy's reduction of relevant questions to metaphysics, therefore, poses critical problems for Christian theology. It makes theology unable to account for a connection between God's physical actions in Christ and relational and institutional factors, such as the forgiveness of sins and Holy Communion, which exist in a taxonomy of the Gospel. A taxonomy of the Gospel exhibits phenomena that contradict the fact-value split that is inherent in modern philosophy. Thus, the focus on metaphysics cannot account for institutions in Christianity in which God communicates something relational—such as the forgiveness of sins—in connection with Christ through physical things, the meaning of which is not the metaphysics of those things, like how sound works, or the molecular structure of water or of bread and wine, but a relational meaning that is attached to those things and conveyed through them. Where modern idealism is operating foundationally in theology, modern theology cannot account for these things. Speech Act Theory, however, can aid theology in accounting for them in the interests of Christian self-description, while calling into question the presuppositions of modern thought.

CHAPTER SIX

A TAXONOMY OF THE GOSPEL

The preceding chapters have discussed many features of modern idealism in some depth. This level of detail is needed to show that modern idealism's impact on Christian theology is not evident only by considering positions taken by certain figures in theology. It becomes evident at the more fundamental level of methodology, that is, in the assumptions, concepts, distinctions, and aims used to justify and direct theological undertakings in the first place. Methodology, as Hans Frei pointed out with his typology of modern theology, shows convergence among some figures in modern theology even though they take different and even opposed positions on particular topics. I follow Frei's lead in order to show that certain conservative theologians are *methodologically* aligned with many liberal theologians, even though their positions on matters like Scripture, Christology, and soteriology break with the traditionally liberal positions on those topics.

But before showing how certain conservative theologians can converge with liberal theologians at the level of methodology on the basis of modern idealism, it is important to explain why methodology matters. This could be a major undertaking in its own right, but there is at least one reason methodology matters that is fundamental and can be explained in a brief way. This reason is that modern idealism makes following the assumptions and logic of the NT and accepting its testimony impossible.

That modern idealism cannot account for the assumptions and logic of the NT becomes evident when features found in the NT are pointed out in a taxonomy of the Gospel, particularly in relation to the problems of public theology, subjectivism, secularism, and the fact-value split. This contention arises from the fact that the taxonomy of the Gospel shows God acting in

physical reality and that such actions can be observed by the senses. Relational values and faith result from such actions contrary to the fact-value split. Furthermore, in a taxonomy of the Gospel human beings suffer God's actions in a way that changes them pursuant to God's purposes. The human ego is not the active judging and determining agent, as in modern idealism. God is the active agent, and God's actions in physical reality, which human beings passively suffer, do not happen in private but in the open. God's actions happen as shared phenomena, but beyond what human understanding regards as possible. These considerations contravene subjectivism. They also mean that God's actions are public but not public theology.

Use of the word "taxonomy" is only intended to mean recognizing certain phenomena and "logical" moves and connections that are seen in the NT for which modern idealism cannot account. If taxonomy is not a favorable word, one could use the word "pattern."¹ This NT taxonomy or pattern generates a need to critique modern idealism in the interests of Christian self-description over against the foundationalism of modern idealism. We will use the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as our primary example for this taxonomy, since modern theology explicitly states that it cannot accept the resurrection on the terms established by modern idealism and since the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is central to the Gospel and the Christian faith. This is not going to be an exhaustive discussion of the Gospel of Christ as presented by the NT by any means. The purpose is to show the kinds of things that theology operating under the influence of modern idealism denies or cannot process.

I will proceed by compiling a narrative of the "facts" found in the NT documents in a manner similar to how a trial attorney compiles the statement of the facts section of a written

¹ Similar patterns are also operating in the OT, such as with the Exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt. The focus here will be on the NT.

brief that is submitted to a court. In such a brief, trial attorneys first summarize the evidence in the record, identifying specific items that are important to the case. These items are called “the facts.” After that, the attorney argues the case based on how the facts relate to the law that applies and governs.² In such a statement of facts, the attorney simply identifies witness testimony (and documentary evidence such as contracts) that is in the record of the case up until that time. The items that have been identified here from the NT in compiling this statement of the facts consist of witness testimony because that is how these items are presented in the NT documents.³

A “Statement of the Facts”

On that fateful day when Pontius Pilate was governing in Palestine for Rome, Jesus of Nazareth was put to death on a Roman cross. He was taken down from the cross dead, and his dead body was put in a tomb (Luke 23:55). His disciples were gathered together a couple of days later in a locked room (John 20:19). Suddenly, Jesus was standing there in their midst (Luke 24:36). They saw Him with their eyes (Luke 24:37). Their initial reaction, according to their framework of reference, was that they were seeing a ghost (Luke 24:37). Jesus then commenced to convince them that He was really alive and standing there in front of them. He did not do this

² The author is quite aware of the way trial attorneys write briefs that are submitted to the court having been a practicing trial attorney for approximately ten years in the State of Colorado and having written and read many such briefs.

³ I am not suggesting that setting forth the “evidence” from the eye-witness testimony will constitute some sort of a necessary “proof” of Jesus’ resurrection. This is because even if a trial on whether Jesus really did rise from the dead were conducted by calling the parade of witnesses amassed here, it is still quite possible, given the extraordinary and singular nature of Jesus’ resurrection, that the jury would not believe it, even though they should conclude that Jesus really rose from the dead based on the evidence and the jury instructions that the court would provide. Besides, rational “proof” is not the Apostle’s way in any event, even if it is of the empirical kind. The Apostle’s way is faith created by the preaching and teaching about Christ and the Holy Spirit working through such preaching and teaching, so that faith does “not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:5). In other words, what faith is and how it comes about in the taxonomy of the Gospel is quite different than what it is and how it comes about on the terms of modern idealism.

by any kind of argument or rational proof. He did it by offering His hands and His feet, that is, His body, to sight and the sense of touch. “See my hands and my feet that it is I myself,” He said to them (Luke 24:39). “Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have,” He said further (Luke 24:39). He had to change their framework of reference from regarding Him as a ghost to “flesh and bones” so that they could understand that He was really alive again. This change happened according to sight, touch, and hearing what Jesus said.

So, the Apostle John, who was there, wrote about how they came to see Jesus alive again and believe in Him as “life”: “That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen with our eyes*, which we looked upon and *have touched with our hands*, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us” (John 1:1–2, emphasis added). He went on to state how he and the rest of the apostles proclaimed Jesus to John’s readers of his letter so that they could share in their fellowship: “[T]hat which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

Thomas, one of the disciples, was not there when the other disciples first saw Jesus alive again (John 20:24). The others told him about seeing Jesus alive again. Thomas said that he would not believe it unless he touched it and saw it for himself (John 20:25). His framework of reference would not permit him to believe such a thing. Eight days later, Jesus’ disciples were gathered together again behind locked doors. Thomas was there. Jesus suddenly appeared again (John 20:26). He told Thomas to touch Him and believe (John 20:27). Thomas did so. He exclaimed, “My Lord and My God!” (John 20:28).

Prior to all this Jesus had appeared alive again to Mary Magdalene. She saw Him and

touched Him. She also heard Him speaking to her in the normal human way (John 20:11–17). She ran and told the disciples that she had seen Jesus alive again and that He had spoken to her (John 20:18). Other women who were with Mary also saw, touched, and heard Jesus alive again (Matt. 28:9).

The risen Jesus later appeared to the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus according to Paul's own testimony (Acts 9:1–7; Acts 26:12–18). He saw a light suddenly shining all around him and heard a voice (Acts 9:3–4; Acts 26:13–14). Moreover, the Apostle Paul gives a run down of Jesus' appearances to people in his first letter to the Christians at Corinth. He says there that Jesus appeared to Peter, then to the twelve disciples, then to over five hundred brethren at one time, then to James and all the apostles, and then to himself (1 Cor. 15:5–8). At the end of that recitation, the Apostle Paul said this: “[S]o we preach and so you believed” (1 Cor. 15:11). He then went on to assert that “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17).

The apostles did preach Christ as crucified and risen from the dead (see, e.g., Acts 2:14–39). The Holy Spirit was inseparably connected to this preaching of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:4, 14). The Holy Spirit caused such preaching to happen and caused the people to believe it (John 16:14; Acts 2:4 in connection with Acts 2:14; Acts 10:34–44; Eph. 1:13). People did come to believe it and a community of faith was formed (1 Cor. 15:11; Acts 2:42).

Observations, Inferences, and a Certain Kind of “Logic”

Examination of this testimony adduced from the NT leads to some observations and to recognizing some inferences and a certain kind of logic being used by the apostles and NT writers. These things can be examined in relation to public theology, subjectivism, secularism, and the fact-value split. We will take public theology and secularism first.

The taxonomy implicates public theology and secularism because it has to do with God's action in physical reality. Public theology requires that Christianity can only affirm in the public square physical events that would be consistent with "evidence and warrants acceptable to any intelligent, rational, responsible person."⁴ In terms of what can happen in physical reality, those warrants are determined by the natural sciences, transcendental philosophy, and common human experience. Such warrants would be according to the prevailing philosophy and science taught in academia and regarded as truth in the culture. Such warrants lead to secularism which insists that God does not act in physical reality at all, even if God is conceded to exist under some conception. Both public theology and secularism hold these positions as presuppositions and rule out *a priori*, in a pre-determined way, the legitimacy of any claim to an occurrence in physical reality that is contrary to their assumptions about how the world works. Both public theology and secularism rule out that Jesus rose from the dead as an actual physical event based on their assumptions. Yet, the testimony adduced from the apostles and women in the NT affirms unequivocally that Jesus came back to life physically after being laid in a tomb dead.

It is evident, therefore, that the taxonomy is incompatible with the assumptions of public theology and secularism because it asserts that God raised Jesus from the dead as an actual, physical event (Rom. 10:9; Gal. 1:1 and the facts section above). The physical reality has to do with Jesus' physical body. This event contravenes public theology because it contravenes what would be regarded as evidence and warrants acceptable to any intelligent, rational, responsible person. The resurrection of Jesus is something that modern philosophy and science assert cannot happen. Jesus' resurrection contravenes secularism because it asserts and demonstrates by eye-witness testimony that God can and does act in physical reality. We could say the same thing

⁴ Placher, "Revisionist and Postliberal Theologies," 395.

about the people of Israel going through the Red Sea (Exod. 14:21–22) and numerous other occurrences testified to in the Bible. So the taxonomy of the Gospel contravenes public theology and secularism and is incompatible with foundationalism.

Yet, the taxonomy depicts the resurrection of Jesus as truly public. The taxonomy shows that the resurrection of Jesus was not a private inner experience, that is, subjective. The taxonomy portrays the resurrection of Jesus as a physical event that could be seen and accessed by the senses as an occurrence in the physical world. It took place among groups, as well as to individuals. It was a shared experience, not only because it took place among groups, but as a matter of principle. It was a shared experience as a matter of principle because Jesus was presented alive for the senses. No one in the statement of facts apprehended Jesus alive again in any other way than directly through the senses. The resurrection of Jesus could be apprehended directly through the senses because it occurred physically in the world. As such, Jesus' resurrection was a public phenomenon, a shared experience, as a matter of fact and as a matter of principle. It was public, just not "public theology."

In philosophical terms, the NT exhibits "realism" not idealism. A realistic view of sense perception permits us to say these things, although, of course, it does not itself prove the truth of what is claimed or provide the content for any particular sense experience. The content is provided by the event in the world that the senses perceive. The modern idealistic view of sense perception, however, would not even permit saying these things as a matter of principle, for the modern idealistic view would only permit, based on its terms, the private experience of an idea in the mind of each person, and there is no theoretical way in modern idealism to connect the idea in the mind with the physical world. This is how the RTP works. Descartes' conception of idea in the RTP cuts the mind off from any external object. As a result, there is no way to account for

the resurrection as a shared experience on modern idealist terms. But since on *realist* terms there is no theoretical, pre-determined, *a priori* epistemological objection to the apostles and others having a shared experience of seeing and touching an event that occurred in the physical world, their sense experience of Jesus can be regarded as public—or cannot be pre-determined to be private—as it also contravenes the dictates of public theology.

In addition to the foregoing, the taxonomy of the Gospel implicates the assumptions of modern idealism with respect to the fact-value split. The fact-value split is implicated by the logical “moves” that the apostles make between the physical event of Jesus’ resurrection and the forgiveness of sins and theology. As was discussed above, the fact-value split arises from Descartes’ treatment of the mind-body problem. In his formulation, body corresponds to the physical universe. Physical events or facts, such as Jesus’ resurrection, would, therefore, be included in the category of “body.” The body is deemed to be entirely governed by the laws of nature that find expression in the natural sciences. Determination of such events would be regarded as an “objective” matter. Values, on the other hand, do not exist as physical phenomena in the world with the result that they cannot be accounted for on the basis of physical causation and the laws of nature. They are, therefore, regarded as private and subjective in modern idealism. In modern idealism, facts and values occupy two distinct categories of things that operate in fundamentally diverse ways and do not interact. The result is that, on modern idealist terms, a fact could not give rise to a value as a basic operating assumption. This assumption can be characterized as not being able to derive an “ought,” a value, from an “is,” an occurrence in physical reality.

Yet, in the taxonomy of the Gospel, the apostles derive values from physical events involving Jesus. Two examples can be adduced. The first example is how the Apostle Paul said

that if Jesus did not really rise again from the dead, then the Christians at Corinth were still in their sins (1 Cor. 15:17), that is, they had no forgiveness of sins. Thus, the resurrection of Jesus, a physical event, secures the forgiveness of sins, a value.⁵ The second example is how Thomas exclaimed that Jesus was his Lord and God upon seeing Jesus alive again from the dead (John 20:28). The Apostle Paul does something similar when he says that Jesus Christ “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). For the apostles, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead shows Him to be the Son of God, a theological claim.

These two examples involve a logical move from a physical or factual occurrence to a value or theology. The forgiveness of sins is a value that pertains to the status of a relationship between God and human beings that has nothing to do with forms of matter in motion. Jesus being Lord and God is a theological matter that likewise has nothing to do with forms of matter in motion. Physical events and relational and theological values involve two distinct categories of things or considerations. In the case of the forgiveness of sins, the apostles declare that the physical event of Jesus’ resurrection brings about reconciliation in the relationship between God and human beings. In case of theology, the apostles declare that the physical event of Jesus’ resurrection gives rise to the theological claim: Jesus is God. The connection of these two distinct categories, however, is impossible to make when the outlook of modern idealism is combined with the assumptions of modern science. A fact can never give rise to a value on modern philosophical and scientific terms. Modern theology operates in a similar way. Lessing

⁵ It is evident that the Apostle Paul does hold that the resurrection of Jesus results in the forgiveness of sins when we turn the Apostle’s statement “If Jesus has been raised, you are not in your sins” around. The logic involved here is negating each part of the statement Paul made, like multiplying each side of an equation by -1 in algebra. Paul’s statement is: “If Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins.” Negating the “not” in the first part, cancels the “not” and makes that part positive. Negating the second part, after the comma, makes that part negative. So we get: “If Christ has been raised, you are not in your sins.”

expressed this when he denied that facts could give rise to universal truths of reason. David Tracy contends that facts are not able to account for the “theistic claim itself.”⁶ In other words, a factual event could have no connection to theology. Theology or the “theistic claim” must be pursued through transcendental philosophy in the modern way. But in the taxonomy, we see the apostles doing the thing that Lessing and Tracy said cannot be done. The apostles and NT writers are operating with a different way of thinking. They exhibit being able to know theological truth and relational values, like the forgiveness of sins, through God’s action in physical reality.

Observing that the apostles make such “logical moves” does not yet provide an account of how they might have done so. There is more to say, and we are not yet prepared to do that. The point here is just to recognize how the apostles derive theology and values from God’s actions in physical reality in Jesus Christ, which the fact-value split, as generated from modern idealism, denies can be done.

The narrative adduced above for a taxonomy of the Gospel also rejects the subjectivism of modern idealism. It does this in its lack of skepticism about sense perception. It was shown above how subjectivism arises from Descartes’ treatment of sense perception in the RTP. In the RTP what a person perceives is an idea that is in the mind. If the idea is supposed to be about some thing in the world, the RTP provides no way to account for whether that idea accurately resembles that thing. Thus, the RTP creates a “veil of ideas” that cuts the mind off from the physical world. This creates skepticism because not being able to be sure of the resemblance between the idea and the thing means that one cannot know the thing through the senses. This scheme creates subjectivism because there can be no way to appeal to anything external to the mind to correct ideas in the mind. On the terms of the RTP, Jesus would not have been able to

⁶ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 205

correct the disciples' initial reaction to His appearances to them as alive, which was that they were seeing a ghost. They were having that reaction pursuant to their framework of reference. Yet, He corrected their initial conclusions through His physicality and physical actions as apprehended by the senses. The RTP also creates subjectivism because ideas in the mind are not shared phenomenon.

In the light of the forgoing, it is evident that modern idealism's epistemological scheme implicates the taxonomy in relation to the "inside-out" or "outside-in" ways of knowing. This is evident because the taxonomy exhibits that the human knowing subjects were affected by factors external to the human mind with respect to what they came to know about Jesus and theology. The RTP can only provide for an inside-out way of knowing. Yet, the apostles came to know in an outside-in way, which led to their theological conclusions. The RTP also implicates the taxonomy with respect to accounting for a community of faith. Accounting for the outside-in way and for a community of faith go together. When the apostles saw and touched Jesus alive again, it changed what they believed. The lack of skepticism with respect to sense perception resulted in their suffering divine action that changed their belief system and brought about personal faith in Jesus as their Savior from sin and death. Their experience of the resurrection through the senses was also a shared experience. A community of faith, with the same faith (in the same content) among the believers, came about. The apostles' personal faith and the community came about because they all witnessed the same thing, and there was no conflict between personal faith and the faith of the community. It can be said that they witnessed the same thing because the taxonomy does not assume the RTP and the outlook of modern idealism.

For subsequent Christians that did not witness Jesus' resurrection, their faith and the community of faith to which they belonged came about through the preaching of the apostles

who did see it. The apostles' experience of the risen Jesus through the senses became speech that had the same reality as its content. That speech was heard. That hearing produced faith in the hearers. Though the individual faith of the hearers was their individual faith, their individual faith for each of them had the same content as the preaching they all heard. The taxonomy shows these things. The apostles saw Jesus alive again. They preached to others that He was alive. A community of faith was formed which held that Jesus was alive again. The RTP and the tenets of modern idealism cannot account for this. Speech Act Theory, however, can.

As a result, the taxonomy rejects subjectivism in how it says faith comes about. This is brought into focus when the Apostle Paul says that “faith arises out of hearing and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17 my translation),⁷ and that “so we preach and so you believed” (1 Cor. 15:11).⁸ In Rom. 10:17, the Apostle Paul asserts that faith arises from outside the mind and heart of the Christian through the faculty of hearing. What is heard with the faculty of hearing is “the word of Christ.” It should be evident that “the word of Christ” is human speech in human language that is “heard” with the ordinary faculty of hearing and the ordinary way people hear human speech—though the Holy Spirit is also involved to produce faith. “The word of Christ” has the person of Christ and the “Christ event” as its content and subject matter. Likewise in 1 Cor. 15:11, the Apostle Paul affirms that faith comes about as a result of “preaching.” Here too that preaching consists of human speech in human language. Its

⁷ The Greek of Rom. 10:17 reads “ἄρα ἡ πίστις ἐξ ἀκοῆς, ἢ δὲ ἀκοῆ διὰ ῥήματος Χριστοῦ.” I have translated “ἐξ ἀκοῆς” as “out of hearing” and have provided the verb “arises.” The Apostle does not provide a verb in that phrase, so a verb has to be supplied for the English translation. Because the preposition “ἐξ” seems to indicate source here, the sense is that faith arises from hearing as its source. The “ἐξ” could also be taken as agency or “means by which” so that the sense would be “by” hearing as the way in which faith comes about. Either way captures the force of the statement that faith results from hearing the word of Christ.

⁸ The Greek of 1 Cor. 15:11 reads “εἴτε οὖν ἐγὼ εἴτε ἐκεῖνοι, οὕτως κηρύσσομεν καὶ οὕτως ἐπιστεύσατε.” The translation of this passage is straightforward and indicates quite clearly that the Corinthian Christians’ believing was the result of the preaching.

propositional content is the resurrection of Jesus and what results from it.

The upshot of these passages is that faith in Christ in the taxonomy arises in an outside-in manner such that God is the active agent in generating the preaching through the event and in generating faith through the preaching. As such, the taxonomy of the Gospel reverses the posture of modern idealism in which the human ego is the active subject and God the passive object. In this taxonomy the human knowing subject must know and believe what is offered by the preaching, which then changes the mind, the intellect, the will, and the heart. Descartes' theory of sense perception is directly called into question here because in his—and also in Kant's view—the intellect is the active agent in constructing “images” or “appearances” rather than the mind receiving passively whatever the senses are providing. If the inside-out way of knowing is correct, then the human ego cannot suffer any action of God from outside the mind and heart as the Apostle Paul describes. We see in a taxonomy of the Gospel that the apostles and writers of the NT understand faith and human life in relation to God in a manner in direct conflict with modern idealism.

It is evident, therefore, that modern idealism and the taxonomy of the Gospel are incompatible. The taxonomy contravenes public theology and secularism because it affirms that God has acted in physical reality in Jesus Christ in a way that public theology and secularism would not accept. The taxonomy contravenes the fact-value split because it exhibits logical “moves” from physical occurrences involving Jesus to values and theology. The taxonomy also contravenes the subjectivism of modern idealism because it does not assume the RTP, which cannot account for humans being changed by physical events and preaching from the outside and which cannot account for the formation of community that shares a common faith and values. By not assuming the RTP and its skepticism and subjectivism, the taxonomy shows that human

beings can be changed in their beliefs and values from the outside in a way that also involves the formation of community.

In the traditional taxonomy of modern theology, these problems have traditionally been regarded as characteristic of “liberal” theology. In the next section, however, it will be shown how these inconsistencies with the taxonomy of the Gospel can also appear in conservative Protestant theologians who either wittingly or unwittingly operate on the basis of the tenets of modern idealism. I now turn to this examination.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MODERN IDEALISM IN AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM

I am now at the point where I can argue the first thesis of this study, namely, that modern idealism has not only deeply influenced liberal theologians, but some conservative theologians as well. Conservative theology usually thinks itself as opposed to modern idealism, because modern idealism is characteristic of liberal theological positions on matters like revelation, Christology, and salvation. At the level of methodology, however, it can be shown that modern idealism has deeply shaped the methodology of some conservative theologians. This chapter examines how this is so. I will interact primarily with the theology of Carl F. H. Henry. I will also make some reference to Francis Schaeffer, Benjamin Warfield, C. Stephen Evans, R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, Arthur Lindsley, and R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

My purpose here is not to disparage, unduly criticize, or offend any conservative theologians and thinkers. I have deep respect for Carl Henry's zeal and enormous effort and production involved in trying to defend the "faith once delivered to the saints" against the zealous, uncompromising, and totalizing onslaughts of the modern outlook. I also have much respect for Francis Schaeffer and the work he did in the interests of the Gospel among modern people struggling with the nihilism and despair that the modern outlook can bring. Still, in a theological work that is focused on methodology, as this project is, it is important to identify potential problems in the theology of our predecessors in the modern age, particularly because of the totalizing nature of modern philosophy. Many conservative theologians are trying to figure out how to extricate theology from the totalizing nature of modern philosophy. In doing so, however, allowing the modern outlook to set the agenda and to obscure the Gospel is always a danger. My interest involves bringing to the surface how the assumptions of modern idealism

can be operating in conservative theology, unwittingly, to show how the Gospel can get lost in the midst of theological interaction with modernity.

Why Carl Henry?

I have selected Carl Henry for examination for two reasons. The first reason is his influence on conservative evangelical theology. Carl Henry was an important figure in American Evangelicalism in the last quarter of the twentieth century. In fact, the Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding (the “Center”) asserts that Carl Henry “was one of the founding architects of the modern, U. S. Evangelical movement.”¹ The Center regards Henry as “the most significant theologian of the ‘neo-evangelical’ movement” and asserts that Time magazine, in 1977, called Henry “the leading theologian” of American evangelicalism.”² The Center additionally sites John Woodbridge as saying that “Dr. Henry was the ‘Great Recoverer’ of social justice and the gospel and the relationship between them.”³

Henry obtained his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Wheaton College. He completed doctoral studies at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1942 and at Boston University in 1949. He taught theology and philosophy of religion at Northern Baptist Seminary until 1947. In 1947 he accepted the call to become the first professor of theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. In 1955 Henry became the first editor of *Christianity Today*, which post he held until 1968. He then subsequently served as a professor of theology at Eastern Baptist Seminary, and as a visiting professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He also served as a lecturer for World Vision International and Prison Fellowship Ministries. From 1967

¹ Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding, accessed on December 22, 2021 at 1:14 p.m., <https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/about/carl-f-h-henry/>.

² Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding.

³ Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding.

to 1970 he was president of the Evangelical Theological Society and from 1979 to 1980 he was president of the American Theological Society. He also provided important leadership for the Berlin (1966) and Lausanne (1974) World Conferences on Evangelism.

The second reason is that the impact of modern idealism is explicit in Henry's theology of revelation, once one knows what to look for. It is contended here that key features of modern idealism's epistemology are present and formative in Henry's theology, which features have had a profoundly negative impact on Christian theology in the modern age. Such features of modern idealism include (1) the universality of reason, (2) reason as the basis for truth, (3) the RTP, and (4) the epistemological structure involved in the *cogito* in which the mind of God and the mind of the human being have an ontological correlation and knowledge consists of an immediate, divine operation going on inside the human mind. Henry's theology reflects these features and in so doing exhibits the problems of public theology, foundationalism, subjectivism, and the fact-value split that plague liberal theology.

In his presentation, Henry interacts with about every conceivable argument and most of the important thinkers in philosophy, theology, and science of the twentieth century up until the times of his writings. In this respect, the breadth of his reading is impressive. He sets forth all of the debates. A concise summary of his thought can be found in his *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief*. His full work is presented in his six-volume *magnum opus*, *God, Revelation and Authority*.

The formative impact of modern idealism on Henry's theology can be seen in specific ways. Henry wants Christian theology to be subject to verification by reason and rational proof. In other words, modern idealism's formative impact shows itself in Henry's theology in Descartes' quest for indubitable certainty. Oswald Bayer reminds us that modern idealism

requires that “[e]verything that exists is under the pressure of having to justify itself, of always having to prove its right to exist.”⁴ Henry’s theology succumbs to this requirement in submitting theology to verification and rational justification. Putting it differently, Henry assumes the epistemology of modern idealism while trying to develop a theology of revelation that addresses modern philosophical problems. Henry assumes the RTP and its associated problems, the fact-value split, the inside-out way of knowing, and finding the source and assurance of knowledge in operations going on in the ego. In other words, Henry adopts an epistemology that is explicitly Cartesian and Kantian, though he tries to “baptize” that epistemology for use in theology. The result is that his theology of revelation is shaped by modern idealism, which has a serious impact on the Gospel.

An important way that Henry embraces Descartes’ quest for certainty and exhibits Descartes’ rationalism is in viewing Christian theology as a deductive system of thought. Henry contends that Christianity is a deductive system of thought like geometry. He asserts that “[e]ver since the beginning of the Christian era the operative methodology for systematic theology has been mainly deductive.”⁵ He contends that Christianity is like a geometric system that has

⁴ Bayer, *Contemporary in Dissent*, 130. The problem of verification and rational justification for Christian theology before the judgment seat of philosophy is not only a problem for Henry. It can be seen in R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 318, where they contend that it is a basic requirement of Reformed theology that “the true God must be *proved* to be the author of revelation [emphasis added].” Indeed, they go on to contend that “classical Reformed theologians recognized that ... *reason must be satisfied* before the Bible can be accepted as the Word of God [emphasis added]” (319). What can this mean but requiring rational proof and, thereby, subjecting Christian claims to the justification required by the modern outlook? Indeed, Sproul, et al., *Classical Apologetics*, 212, seem to reflect the idealism and rationalism of the modern outlook when they contend that “apologetics is a journey—an intellectual journey” that starts with the self. They go on to contend that “[f]rom time immemorial all people have assumed that they must begin their thinking with themselves for there is no other place where *they* can begin [emphasis original].” It is certainly the case that there is no other place that the *modern* person is taught or claims to begin than with the self.

⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 37–38. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority (GRA)*, Vol. 1, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations*, (1976; repr., Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 227; Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 37–38, feels justified, in part, for regarding theology as a deductive system because he thinks Augustine and Anselm did as well.

axioms from which all other assertions can be deduced by logical consistency.⁶ Mathematics for Henry is the model for Christian theology. He champions a deductive system like geometry as the epistemological model for theology because he finds fault with what he calls an “evidentialist approach,” which is characterized by empiricism and induction.⁷ The problem with the evidentialist approach for Henry is that it relies on probabilities.⁸ That sounds like an echo of Descartes’ concerns about tradition and knowledge arising from the senses in his quest for indubitable certainty. Such sources of knowledge were rejected by Descartes because they could

Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture: The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, Vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 186, also regards Christianity as a system of thought.

⁶ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 64, asserts that “[j]ust as geometry has basic axioms from which its theorems flow, so theological and philosophical systems also have governing axioms. Axioms are the ruling principles with which any system of thought begins.” Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 49, asserts that “[t]he Christian’s primary ontological axiom is the one living God, and his primary epistemological axiom is divine revelation. On these basic axioms depend all the core beliefs of Biblical theism, including divine creation, sin and the Fall, the promise and provision of redemption, the Incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, the regenerate Church as a new society, and a comprehensive eschatology.” Henry, *GRA*, 1:227, states that “[t]here is but one system of truth, and that system involves the right axiom and its theorems and premises derived with complete logical consistency.” It is logically impossible, however, to deduce historical events by the operations of logic pursuant to a deductive system as even Descartes acknowledged. One way of getting at this contention is by recognizing the difference between analytical and synthetic propositions. Anthony Kenny, “Descartes to Kant,” 168, explains that “[a]n analytic proposition, Frege said, is one whose justification depends only on general logical laws and definitions. A synthetic proposition is one whose justification depends on principles of particular sciences. Like Kant, Frege defines an *a posteriori* proposition as one which depends on particular matters of fact and experience. Both Kant and Frege frame their definitions in such a way that a judgment cannot be both analytic and synthetic.” Kenny, “Descartes to Kant,” 177, goes on to explain that “[t]he highest principle of analytic judgments is the principle of non-contradiction: . . . But the principle of non-contradiction will not take us beyond the field of analytic propositions: it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the truth of synthetic propositions.” In other words, the law of noncontradiction can help us distinguish between matters of fact but it cannot generate them. Thus, Kenny, “Descartes to Kant,” 177, explains that “[i]n a synthetic judgment two non-identical concepts are put together.” Thus, Jesus being both true God and true Man would be a synthetic proposition because “two non-identical concepts [God and Man] are put together. Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 78, explains that a proposition is synthetic “when its validity is determined by the facts of experience.” Or, to put it in terms of analyticity, Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 79, explains that analytic statements, unlike synthetic statements, “are entirely devoid of factual content.” If, therefore, Jesus is known as Son of God *by* his resurrection from the dead, and other miracles he performed and things he said, which would involve factual content, then Christology and the Trinity, along with redemption, and all the other central doctrines of the Christian faith, including the inspiration of Scripture, are synthetic propositions. They cannot, therefore, be deduced by the law of noncontradiction from axioms. Either that or Henry must espouse a strict and thoroughgoing determinism which renders history practically meaningless.

⁷ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 40, asserts that “[m]y premise is the legitimacy of deductive theology and the invalidity of the evidentialist alternative.”

⁸ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 40.

only reach the level of probability.

A convergence of Henry with Kierkegaard can be seen here. Henry notes how evidentialists in Christian theology criticize Henry's deductive theology as being fideist.⁹ They do so because Henry contends that the axioms sitting atop the deductive system do not need to be proved. In response, Henry asserts, "Axioms are the ruling principles with which any system of thought begins. They are never deduced or inferred from other principles but are simply presupposed. No axiom is arrived at by reasoning; as the starting point, an axiom is therefore in the nature of the case beyond proof."¹⁰ Henry then argues that Kierkegaard was the true fideist, while he regards his own conception as distinguished from Kierkegaard's thought.¹¹

It seems to be true on the surface that Henry's rationalist, deductive theology attempts to solve the epistemological problems posed by modern idealism in a different way than Kierkegaard's existentialism. Yet, Henry and Kierkegaard share a basic epistemological assumption that is characteristic of modern idealism. Both assume that the senses and history cannot be relied upon to provide certain knowledge because they operate on the level of probabilities. Both Kierkegaard and Henry also share Descartes' quest for indubitable certainty and his skepticism toward other sources of knowledge. Henry and Kierkegaard were not, therefore, operating on categorically different epistemological ground, and it can even be queried whether Henry's theology of revelation does not really approach Kierkegaard's existentialism, or at least plant the seeds for its further development in conservative theology, since they share the

⁹ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 38–39. Sproul, et al., *Classical Apologetics*, 318, make this contention when they state that "[i]n all systems of thought except presuppositionalism [i.e., Henry's system], circular reasoning is considered demonstrative evidence of error." Thus, Sproul, et al., *Classical Apologetics*, 337, accuse Henry of being a fideist because he assumes God's existence without proving it.

¹⁰ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 64.

¹¹ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 39.

same epistemological assumptions.

Recognizing Henry's commitment to a deductive system of thought is important because it shows that Henry was already committed to Descartes' reasons for arguing that deduction is the true way of knowledge, while rejecting other sources of knowledge, like tradition and the senses. Since reliable knowledge for Descartes cannot come from without from tradition and the senses, certainty must come from within the knower in innate knowledge, rational reasoning, and operations and structures in the human mind. We will see the same structure of epistemology in Henry. Moreover, Henry will argue for legitimacy of certain knowledge coming from within on the basis of a certain anthropology, as does Descartes. The difference between Henry and Kierkegaard was that Henry argued for certainty being found in innate ideas and rational deduction, while Kierkegaard found it in the will, in decision.

Henry's common epistemological ground with Descartes is concerning since modern idealism has shaped liberal theology, and liberal theology has not been able to maintain the scriptural and orthodox confession of the Christian faith under the influence of modern idealism. Since it shares common ground with Descartes' epistemology, it would not be surprising to see Henry's theology begin to converge with contentions made in liberal theology that relate to the Gospel and the relationship of the Christian church to broader society.

This concern is justified by what Henry said about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He called it "a bizarre and even brute event [that] has no meaning and supplies no confident basis for cognitive claims."¹² He asserted in another place that "Christianity contends ... that man everywhere stands in more direct relationships to God's general revelation than to historical

¹² Henry, *GRA*, 3:158.

evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”¹³ It is surprising to see the resurrection of Jesus regarded as “bizarre” and “brute” by an orthodox Evangelical. Henry says that the resurrection, as a physical event, has no meaning in itself because it provides no basis “for *cognitive* claims.” In his thought, there appears to be a disjunction between the physical event of the resurrection and what cognition could claim to be true. Henry appears to be espousing a view of what counts as knowledge that is in contrast to how the apostles came to know the resurrection. The RTP and the fact-value split appear to be operating in his view because the physical event cannot lead to a cognitive claim. This sounds reminiscent of Lessing’s contention that physical events cannot give rise to necessary truths of reason. There seems to be a huge assumption operating for Henry that the resurrection—and any other important event for Christianity—must satisfy cognition in order to be meaningful and count as knowledge. In other words, it sounds like Christian claims must satisfy reason in order to be meaningful and real knowledge. The relational category and faith in the sense of trust are missing. That God could be or do something that is beyond reason’s abilities is missing. It is also significant that Henry could suggest that human beings in their natural state and their use of reason stand in a more direct relation to God in general revelation than in relation to Jesus’ resurrection. The reason for this seems to be that general revelation is immediate for Henry based on a certain anthropology, while evidence for the resurrection is not. Henry seems to imply that reliable knowledge comes through rational thought while historical events are only relative and subject to the probabilities of sense perception. What happens to the Gospel in this which is based on God’s actions in physical reality as given to sense perception?

In contrast to Henry, the Apostle Paul and the other apostles, who witnessed Christ’s resurrection and were sent to testify about it to the world *by the risen Christ*, did not find it

¹³ Henry, *GRA*, 1:222–23.

“bizarre” and without meaning. The resurrection was a fact that changed their lives. The event itself as apprehended through the senses was full of meaning, and it conveyed that meaning. Henry’s theology of revelation, however, operates in a much different way. It exhibits skepticism about the event. This is because Henry adopts the RTP and the epistemology wrapped up in it. Meaning can only be had from some other source, from within, other than from the event itself. Facts can only have meaning when that meaning is supplied by a theory that comes from some source other than the facts. But this makes his concept of divine revelation determine everything. Nothing outside the person, like the event of the resurrection and the preaching of the same, could be the source of revelation. Divine revelation operates from within. But this is the modern idealist way of knowledge. As a result, there are underlying epistemological issues and commitments going on in Henry’s statements about the resurrection that implicate the philosophical issues involved in modern idealism.

There is no way to be exhaustive in this discussion. What will be provided is a flavor of how modern idealism affects Henry’s theology in ways that are the focus of this study. Consequently, the discussion will revolve around the issues of foundationalism and public theology, and subjectivism or the inside-out way of knowing in epistemology. It will also be queried whether secularism will be the inevitable result of Henry’s theology for conservative Protestant theology in America.

The Problem of Foundationalism or Henry’s Correlation of Revelation and Reason

Revelation is the central topic of Henry’s theology. It is precisely where the methodological issues involving the epistemological structure of modern idealism come into play. By itself, this only reflects that Henry took modern idealism seriously, and that concern was quite justified. But when we consider closely how Henry’s theology of revelation operates in

relation to epistemological assumptions and contentions, the influence of modern idealism on his theology becomes apparent by being a clear and consistent instance of foundationalism patterned after the concerns and assumptions raised and established by Descartes.

One feature of foundationalism is its insistence on general rather than particular methods and standards, that there must be a general epistemology that will determine meaning and what can count as knowledge in every discipline and area of thought, including theology. At the beginning of volume one of *God, Revelation, and Authority*, Henry adopted the modern idealistic need for a general epistemology when he argued that appealing to God and revelation must embrace “some agreement on rational methods of inquiry, ways of argument, and criteria for verification.”¹⁴ He regarded the critical question in theology in 1976 as being not just what the “data” of theology were, but how one proceeds from the data “to conclusions that commend themselves to rational reflection.”¹⁵ Henry’s endeavor was to show how American Evangelical theology can demonstrate that God, revelation, and “the data of theology” are commensurate with *rational* inquiry. He was concerned about epistemology in a way that would have agreement with rational *methods*. He stated that

Christian theology is interested no less than any other science in discussing presuppositions and principles, sources and data, purposes or objectives, methods of knowing, verifiability and falsifiability. Indeed, Christianity is a genuine science in the deepest sense because it presumes to account in an intelligible and orderly way for whatever is legitimate in every sphere of life and learning.¹⁶

His conception of Christian theological method sounds remarkably like Descartes’, who argued for a universal ground of knowledge, and also like David Tracy’s, who was no orthodox

¹⁴ Henry, *GRA*, 1:14.

¹⁵ Henry, *GRA*, 1:14.

¹⁶ Henry, *GRA*, 1:203–4.

conservative and argued that the standards governing theological method should be no different than those in the other disciplines.¹⁷

Henry is here exhibiting the nature of public theology. By insisting that there must be general criterion of knowledge that would apply to any area of thought, he subjects revelation to “evidence and warrants acceptable to any intelligent, rational, responsible person.” Henry expressly says as much:

Christianity contends that revelational truth is intelligible, expressible in valid propositions, and universally communicable. Christianity does not profess to communicate a meaning that is significant only within a particular community or culture. It expects men of all cultures and nations to comprehend its claims about God and insists that men everywhere ought to acknowledge and appropriate them.¹⁸

Accordingly, Henry insists that “all humanity can comprehend God’s revelation and, moreover, can comprehend it *prior to regeneration or special illumination by the Holy Spirit*. Mankind in its present condition is capable of intellectually analyzing rational evidence for the truth value of assertions about God.”¹⁹ Thus, it appears that Henry thinks that anyone can comprehend the claims of the Gospel and the teaching about God by their natural powers and that this ability is universal. Not even the corruption of human nature by sin prevents this.²⁰ Since “publicly shared

¹⁷ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 7, where he states that “in principle, the fundamental loyalty of the theologian *qua* theologian is to that morality of scientific knowledge which he shares with his colleagues, the philosophers, historians, and social scientists. No more than they, can he allow his own—or his tradition’s—beliefs serve as warrants for his arguments. In fact, in all properly theological inquiry, the analysis should be characterized by those same ethical stances of autonomous judgment, critical reflection, and properly skeptical hard-mindedness that characterize analysis in other fields.”

¹⁸ Henry, *GRA*, 1:229.

¹⁹ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 105, emphasis added. Henry, *GRA*, 1:239, also states, “The ideal of systematic explanation and completeness was not simply borrowed by modern science from the great philosophers of the past or evoked by experience; its roots are far deeper in the very nature of man as a reflective being and in sustained constructive thought, and beyond that in the fact that man as a distinctive creature of God *stands continually in touch with revelation* [emphasis original].”

²⁰ Henry, *GRA*, 1:227, states, “Not even the cataclysmic moral tragedy of the fall has wholly demolished man’s capacity for knowing God and his revealed truth.”

reason is a divinely gifted instrument for recognizing truth” for Henry,²¹ he subjects divine revelation to “evidence and warrants” that any human being can accept. As a result, he shares the assumptions and problems that give rise to public theology with David Tracy,²² who did not affirm orthodox, conservative theology in his *Blessed Rage for Order*.

Another feature of foundationalism that goes along with the requirement for general standards and methods is that there must be a general not limited accessibility of knowledge. Universal reason comes into play. This is clear in Henry’s definition of revelation. He states, “Divine revelation is the source of *all* truth, the truth of Christianity included; *reason* is the instrument for recognizing it; Scripture is its verifying principle; logical consistency is a negative *test* for truth and coherence a subordinate *test*.”²³ Accordingly, Henry views divine revelation as universal, since he sees it as a source of *all* knowledge, not only for Christian claims and teaching, but for “all” truth.²⁴ Divine revelation guarantees knowledge with respect to the general epistemological problems relating to whether God, the world, and other minds exists.²⁵ So it seems that for Henry a person must be receiving divine revelation in being an auto mechanic, a medical doctor, an accountant, or a really good cook. Such a view is quite different than Luther’s, but then Luther makes a distinction between what can be known by unaided reason and what can only be known by divine revelation through faith. One can know how to be a really

²¹ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 106.

²² Placher, “Revisionist and Postliberal Theologies,” *passim*, where he discusses the relationship between David Tracy’s revisionist theology and the concept of public theology.

²³ Henry, *GRA*, 1:215, emphasis added.

²⁴ Henry, *GRA*, 1:196, also states, “Not only is divine revelation rational, but it is, in Christian purview, the ground of *all* rationality [emphasis original].”

²⁵ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 57, contends that “[e]very human being is aware ... that knowing truth and the good puts one in touch with divinity. Not only do all human beings share these formal aspects of the *imago* ..., but also they know instinctively and intuitively that God does in fact exist, that the world really exists, and that other selves actually exist.”

good cook with unaided reason. But believing and knowing the Gospel is an entirely different matter.²⁶ Henry creates confusion here because he needs divine revelation to provide universal knowledge so that American Evangelical Christianity can influence American culture and the world in terms of government, education, politics, and economics in a “Christian” way.²⁷ The purpose of theology, in other words, is to provide the basis for political, economic, and social engagement of American culture; not only engagement but also dominance and control.²⁸ Henry’s view, however, blurs any distinction between the church and secular society, with the result that the church must begin to look like secular society, since divine revelation happens across the board; there is a continuity between the Christian and non-Christian. This is what public theology calls for.

²⁶ Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, chs. 6–8: Luther’s Works*, Vol. 23, trans. Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 84, comments on the relation of the Christian faith proper and “all” knowledge, when he states that “in external and worldly matters let reason be the judge. For there you can calculate and figure out that a cow is bigger than a calf, that three ells are longer than one ell, that a gulden is worth more than a groschen, that a hundred guldens are more than ten guldens, and that it is better to place a roof over the house than under it. Stay with that. You can easily figure out how to bridle a horse, for reason teaches you that. Prove yourself a master in that field. God has endowed you with reason to show you how to milk a cow, to tame a horse, and to realize that a hundred guldens are more than ten guldens. There you should demonstrate your smartness; there be a master and an apt fellow and utilize your skill. But in heavenly matters and in matters of faith, when a question of salvation is involved, bid reason observe silence and hold still.” Luther’s remarks reject Descartes’ contention for the universality of reason, for he expressly argues that reason has authority in some matters but not in others, particularly not in matters relating to salvation and theology. It would seem that he also contends that “revelation” is only needed when it comes to salvation and the teaching of and holding to the Christian faith, contrary to Henry. “Revelation” is not a concept that needs to be applied to *all* knowledge.

²⁷ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 68, states, “If historic Christianity is again to compete as a vital world *ideology*, evangelicalism must project a solution for the most pressing world problems. It must offer a formula for a new world mind with spiritual ends, involving evangelical affirmations in political, economic, sociological, and educational realms, local and international.”

²⁸ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *Culture Shift: The Battle for the Moral heart of America* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2011), 1–2, explained that “the late Carl F. H. Henry addressed evangelicals with a manifesto for Christian engagement in his landmark book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. As Dr. Henry eloquently argued, disengagement from the critical issues of the day is not an option. An evangelical theology for political participation must be founded in the larger context of cultural engagement. As the Christian worldview makes clear, our ultimate concern must be by the glory of God. When Scripture instructs us to love God and then to love our neighbor as ourselves, it thereby gives us a clear mandate for the *right* kind of cultural engagement.” But if the church is supposed to be about engaging culture in the *right* way, how does redemption and the forgiveness of sins fit?

Henry's claim about the universality of divine revelation is consistent with Descartes trying to find an indubitably certain foundation for knowledge in any field of human endeavor. Henry is asserting universal explication, just like Descartes did. Modernity imposes this kind of pressure, that a thinker must be able to present a way of thinking, a worldview, that on its essential terms encompasses everything, which must then be the basis of public discourse and values. Henry was not alone in working this way. Schaeffer does the same thing, when he says that "[t]he strength of the Christian system—the acid test of it—is that everything fits under the apex of the existing, infinite-personal God, and it is the only system in the world where this is true. No other system has an apex *under which everything fits*. That is why I am a Christian and no longer an agnostic."²⁹ Indeed, both Henry and Schaeffer regard Christianity as a system of thought. In fact, Christianity must be a system of thought for them. Otherwise, it could not compete with or be an answer to modernity, which is what Christianity must be.

Foundationalism implies that reason must be *satisfied* with claims to knowledge and truth. In this way, foundationalism is the motivation for public theology and the unquestioned assumption of secularism. Henry's account of revelation is consistent in this respect because Henry posits a relationship between revelation and reason, but not to faith in the sense of personal trust. He asserts that revelation is given to reason. Reason is the human faculty that recognizes revelation.³⁰ This understanding of revelation does not relate revelation to faith in the

²⁹ Schaeffer, *Christian View of Philosophy*, 1:339, emphasis added. What about being a Christian because of reconciliation with God and the forgiveness of sins in the death and resurrection of Christ obtained through the spoken and written Gospel and faith, something that neither reason nor systematic explication know?

³⁰ Henry, *GRA*, 1:227, states, "That man's reason is a divine gift for recognizing God's truth is a main tenet of the Christian faith. Human reason was a divine endowment enabling man to have knowledge of God and his purposes in the universe. The functions of reason—whether concepts, forms of implication, deduction and induction, judgments and conclusions, and whatever else—are not simply a pragmatic evolutionary development but fulfill a divine intention and purpose for man in relation to the whole realm of knowledge. Not even the cataclysmic moral tragedy of the fall has wholly demolished man's capacity for knowing God and his revealed truth." Henry moves with ease between talking about knowing God and "the whole realm of knowledge," as if they are part of each other,

sense that the purpose of revelation is to engender faith and to be received by it. Henry's view poses a stark contrast with the Apostle Paul, for Paul states that the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel "from faith *for faith*" (Rom. 1:17). In contrast, Christianity for Henry is part of "all truth," and it is the revelation of all truth that is the purpose of divine revelation. Faith must, therefore, be absorbed by reason into general revelation. This immediately creates the problem of just how "special revelation" relates to "general revelation," that is to say how the Gospel is supposed to relate to reason in general. The problems of public theology and secularism are directly implicated, for if revelation is given to reason, then the Gospel and God's actions in physical reality become subject to the standards that reason can accept as understood in the broader culture.³¹

As a result, Henry's specific account of revelation deserves even closer scrutiny. He claims that reason is the instrument for "recognizing" divine revelation. That he uses the word "recognize" is noteworthy. Contrast it with the word "receive," for example.³² The word "recognize" is active with the person as the active agent in charge. The word "receive" is passive where the person is suffering an action by someone else, namely, God through the Gospel and sacraments. The word "recognize" suggests the capacity to determine that something is divine revelation. "Recognizing" suggests judging, evaluating, determining, and verifying, which is exactly what reason does with respect to divine revelation, according to Henry. Recognition must be a pre-condition to receiving revelation, that is, believing it.

such that revelation includes knowledge of anything.

³¹ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 39, states, "What Poplin fails to note ... is that Paul's appeal to faith in no way repudiates either public reason or logic."

³² Compare John 1:12, "[T]o all who did *receive* [Jesus], who *believed* in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God [emphasis added]."

For this reason, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Henry makes revelation subject to reason. Henry's concept of reason recognizing revelation reflects the framework of subject-object dualism where the human ego is the judging, active agent. But this is the modern way *a la* Descartes and Kant. In a similar way, C. Stephen Evans reflects this status of the ego when he describes choosing the Christian faith as being like a jury trial where evidence is amassed, but the determination is not based on a preponderance of the evidence but on the "good sense and judgment" of reasonable people who make good decisions.³³ Thus, it would seem that only a person who is already reasonable and has good sense, which is to say already good, can decide for the Gospel. Evans goes on to assert that "[i]n the area of religious faith, each of us is our own juror."³⁴

Since reason is the instrument for recognizing revelation, Henry asserts that divine revelation is subject to rational "tests," namely the logical laws of non-contradiction and coherence. Henry maintains that "if reason is the precondition of all intelligible experience, then it will be necessary to avoid the divorce of faith and logic."³⁵ Schaeffer agrees when he says that "I want to suggest that scientific proof, philosophical proof and religious proof follow the same

³³ C. Stephen Evans, *The Quest for Faith: Reason & Mystery as Pointers to God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 28–29.

³⁴ Evans, *Quest for Faith*, 29.

³⁵ Henry, *GRA*. 1:233. See also Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 95, where he contends that "[i]n a universe where the *Logos* is the source and support of created existence, logic is the *form* of reality [emphasis original]." As a result, Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 80–81, thinks he can argue that "[e]very objective worldview affirms that we can know something that everybody else can know and ought to believe. And if we profess to know shareable knowledge, that belief involves us in further relationships to the laws of thought, notably the laws of identity, of non-contradiction, and of excluded middle. Christianity does not disdain the canons of rationality. It offers a comprehensive logical network of beliefs. . . . Legitimate tests can be applied to the truth claims of the differing metaphysical models that propose to explain all existence and life. The axioms of any system are testable for the consistency or inconsistency with which they account for relevant data. The axioms lose explanatory power if theorems deduced from them are shown to be logically inconsistent. Contradiction and logical inconsistency have exposed the invalidity of many belief claims. Since logical inconsistency invalidates any syllogism, logical consistency is a negative test of truth."

rules.”³⁶ Christianity is a system of thought according to Henry and Schaeffer.³⁷ The logical laws of non-contradiction and coherence are critical to a deductive system of thought. By referring to the laws of logic as rational tests, Henry uses the word “reason” in the sense of logic, which is also what Descartes and Kant did. So, in Henry’s concept of revelation God could not transcend logic in any way, as in Jesus Christ being true God and true Man in one singular person, God being the Holy Trinity, or saying that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

By way of clarification, the law of non-contradiction means that a system of thought cannot be true if it contains assertions that contradict each other. If we affirm that something is the color blue, then it could not also be the color yellow.³⁸ A person could not, therefore, be both finite and infinite at the same time.

The relationship between reason, in the sense of logic, and the assertions of the Christian faith is problematic, however. A younger new member in my congregation illustrated this for me in “new member class.” She showed just how inconsistent the Christian faith can seem to be to reason in reference to the Gospel asserting that Christ died for sinners (Rom. 5:6–8). She stated,

³⁶ Schaeffer, *Christian View of Philosophy*, 1:121.

³⁷ Henry, *GRA*, 1:240–41, states that “the content of revelation does indeed lend itself to systematic exposition, and the more orderly and logical that exposition is, the nearer the expositor will be to the mind of God in his revelation.” It is frightening to hear Henry say that a person gets closer to God by thinking in a more logically consistent manner. It should not be surprising then that the Bible is also systematic. Henry, *GRA*, 1:239, states, “But Scripture is itself implicitly systematic. No one who contends that the Bible as a literary document is a canon of divinely inspired truths can hold otherwise without reflecting adversely on the mind of God.” Henry knows God’s mind as systematic. So Scripture must also be systematic. But how does Henry know God to be systematic and just what kind of system does God have? Henry is engaging in idealistic assumptions about God. Certainly, God is not incoherent in Himself, but to suggest that such a recognition gives warrant to *knowing* by logic just how and in what way God is systematic reflects the requirements of idealism and makes Scripture subject to our systematization. Schaeffer, *Christian View of Philosophy*, 1:93, says that “[r]ightly understood, Christianity as a system has the answers to the basic needs of modern man.” It is not disputed here that Christianity has answers that can meet the needs of modern man. It is disputed that those answers that are distinctively Christian consist of knowledge given through logic and reason and must meet modern requirements to be a system.

³⁸ Schaeffer, *Christian View of Philosophy*, 1:6, where he states that “if one thing was right, its opposite was wrong. This little formula, “A is A” and if you have A, it is not non-A,” is the first move in classical logic.” In other words, A cannot be both A and not A at the same time. That would be a contradiction. Hence the law of non-contradiction.

in a genuine and humble honesty, that it is not rational for Christ to make such a sacrifice for people who do not deserve it, but that is exactly what Christ did according to the Apostle Paul (Rom. 5:6, 8). She was just using her natural reason in making that comment. This shows, however, how the law of non-contradiction and the Gospel are not necessarily friendly to each other. Natural reason cannot recognize grace. It can only recognize justice in a logical consistency. Natural reason operating in general revelation that is accessible to everyone is not friendly to special revelation, which is only accessible to repentance and faith by means of God's word. I would suspect that Henry affirms the claims of Rom. 5 with respect to the Gospel. So, subjecting "divine revelation" to rational tests poses a bigger problem than Henry realizes, and Schaeffer too. There is a confusion and distortion in Henry's doctrine of revelation that goes to the very root.

Henry is propounding a confusion when it comes to the use of reason in Christian theology. If Henry means that reason is necessary to be able to understand *what* is being asserted in a particular sentence, there is no argument—although presuppositions can often blind us to what is being asserted or to the facts, even though we should otherwise be able to know these things. For example, if I tell you that my car is blue, you must understand that the word "blue" is intended to refer to the color blue and not the color red, if you are to get the gist of my sentence. The law of non-contradiction does operate in this way when it comes to language and understanding what someone is saying. We could not communicate in speech without that logical law. It is a far different matter, however, to contend that reason must be the supreme judge of subject matter and determiner of what can exist, or be true, or be believed. If reason goes into the very heart of subject matter to test the subject matter's validity, then Henry subjects the substance of the Christian faith to the judgments of reason. This problem becomes acute if matters central to the

Christian faith transcend logic. How could God become flesh, for example? (John 1:1, 14). Reason does not regard as possible that one person could be both infinite (God) and finite (a human being) at the same time, yet that is exactly what the Christian faith claims with the person of Jesus Christ.³⁹

Reason being the instrument that recognizes divine revelation means that Henry's concept of revelation requires that any article of the doctrine of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be reconciled to the canons of reason. Descartes thought the same thing about tradition and all knowledge. In Descartes' view, tradition is acceptable if it can be reconciled with reason.⁴⁰ Henry is playing Descartes' game in his very definition of divine revelation.

Henry's definition of revelation, therefore, immediately implicates the issue of foundationalism with the result of conflating general and special revelation. Foundationalism is implicated because it is characteristic of foundationalism to make Christian claims subject to verification by reason. It is also characteristic of foundationalism to treat Christianity according to general standards of truth, as one instance in a "general class," as Frei put it. Liberal theology treats Christianity in this way. Conservative theology would want to treat the Christian faith in its own right and on its own terms, according to Christian self-description. Henry's concept of divine revelation, however, requires that Christianity become one instance in a general class precisely because he makes reason the faculty for receiving revelation while also making revelation pertain to all knowledge. There is no distinction between general and special revelation in terms of a difference in kind in Henry's theology. General and special revelation are

³⁹ Martin Luther, "Die Disputationen de sententia: Verbum caro factum est (Joh. 1, 14)" (1539), in *Luthers Werke Full-Text Database*, Schriften 39. II. Band, Disputationen 1539–1545, ed. G. Bebermeyer (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 2000–2001. ProQuest), 1–33. The title of this document in English is "The Disputation Concerning the Sentence: The Word Became Flesh."

⁴⁰ Descartes, *Discourse*, 9.

both revelation of the same species.⁴¹ It must follow, therefore, that special and general revelation must be correlated. In fact, Henry states that special revelation must be assimilated to general revelation.⁴² Henry conflates general and special revelation so that it is not all clear that Christianity will not get absorbed into general revelation and become an instance in a general class, in which the distinctives of Christ and the Gospel will get lost. It is not clear how Henry's view of revelation is different than Tracy's understanding of theology as a correlation between the "Christian fact" and "common human experience" as expressed in transcendental philosophy.⁴³

In addition to the foregoing problems, the foundationalism of modern idealism requires and advances a particular anthropology. It does so in the quest of being able to find the ground for asserting the universality of reason and a common ground for all knowledge, particularly between the believer and unbeliever. This was clear with Descartes, among others, who proposed a strict distinction of mind and body, and who characterized the mind especially with reason. This was also clear in Descartes where he found the basis of knowledge in the ego and correlated the ego to God with respect to God putting ideas directly into the mind.

So, it would be reasonable to ask about the anthropology of Henry and other conservative evangelicals. When we look, we see modern idealism correlated with the concept of the image of God. The issue is that there must be a grounding in the human being that can substantiate the

⁴¹ Henry, *GRA*, 1:223, "The Bible openly publishes man's predicament and God's redemptive remedy in the form of objectively intelligible statements. The scriptural revelation takes epistemological priority over general revelation, *not because general revelation is obscure or because man as sinner cannot know it*, but because Scripture as an inspired literary document *republishes the content of general revelation objectively*, over against sinful man's reductive dilutions and misconstructions [emphasis added]."

⁴² Henry, *GRA*, 1:324, where he states that "the theological transcendent a priori additionally professes a revelational grounding. It comprehends innate knowledge in the context of universal divine revelation and to aprioristic knowledge it assimilates special revelation as well.... Wherever it is true to its inner spirit, Christian knowledge theory cannot expound that a priori independently of either general or special revelation."

⁴³ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 43, 47–49.

claims for a universal epistemology and universal explication. The grounding is found in the image of God. The use of the image of God for this purpose is pervasive and foundational in the thought of Henry and Schaeffer.⁴⁴ Henry, for example, states that

Man's power of attaining truth depends ... first of all upon the fact that God has made man like Himself, whose intellect is the home of the intelligible world, the contents of which may, therefore, be reflected in the human soul; and then, secondly, that God, having so made man, has not left him, deistically, to himself, but continually reflects into his soul the contents of His own eternal and immutable mind.⁴⁵

Henry is reflecting the thought of Benjamin Warfield here, who states that

Augustine's ontology of the intuition by which man attains intelligible truth, embraced especially two factors: the doctrine of the image of God, and the doctrine of dependence on God. ... The soul is therefore in unbroken communion with God, and in the body of intelligible truths reflected into it from God, sees God.⁴⁶

Descartes thought so too.⁴⁷ These evangelicals use the image of God to establish a universal, common ground in human reason so that they can establish theism in correlation with the unbeliever. This common ground consists of a metaphysical continuity and connection between the mind of God and the mind of the human being which consists of the image of God.

Accordingly, Schaeffer states that “[t]he reasonableness of the incarnation, and the reasonableness of communication between God and man, turn on this point—that man, as man, is created in the image of God.”⁴⁸ He goes on to assert that “[t]he biblical presentation indicates that because man is made in God's image, the problem of God communicating to him is not of

⁴⁴ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 57, contends that “[e]very human being is aware ... that knowing truth and the good puts one in touch with divinity. Not only do all human beings share these formal aspects of the *imago* ..., but also they know instinctively and intuitively that God does in fact exist, that the world really exists, and that other selves actually exist.” Henry, *GRA*, 1:328, also asserts: “‘Innate ideas’ are an immediate product of a divine activity of illumination going on constantly in the mind.”

⁴⁵ Henry, *GRA*, 1:327.

⁴⁶ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1930), 145.

⁴⁷ Descartes, *Meditations*, 29.

⁴⁸ Schaeffer, *Christian View of Philosophy*, 1:103.

an absolutely different order from that of man speaking to man. We are finite, God is infinite, but we can understand truly.”⁴⁹ Henry goes so far as to assert that “God does and can make our representational images adequate to knowledge of himself.”⁵⁰ That is an extravagant claim, to say the least, since it requires that the finite mind be able to represent the infinity of God to itself in a confidence that is sure that its idea of God actually does resemble God as He is in Himself. Jesus, the Apostle John, and the Apostle Paul, however, do not agree that the human mind can do this.⁵¹

So the image of God for Henry, Schaeffer, and Warfield is supposed to provide an analogy of being between God and humans that can serve as the epistemological ground of universal reason being able to comprehend divine revelation. The nature of the human being allows the human being to comprehend divine revelation and the Gospel. The image of God provides an ontological anthropology that provides epistemological guarantees.⁵² The image of God is the basis for the innate ideas of the existence of God, the existence of the world, and the existence of other selves.⁵³ Henry asserts that “[i]nnate ideas’ are an immediate product of a divine activity of illumination going on constantly in the mind.”⁵⁴ But Descartes said the same thing. Because of the image of God, in Henry’s view, there is a transcendental basis for every human being to be in

⁴⁹ Schaeffer, *Christian View of Philosophy*, 1:105.

⁵⁰ Henry, *GRA*, 3:226.

⁵¹ Jesus said, “[N]ot that anyone has seen the Father” (John 6:45). The Apostle John says that “no one has ever seen God” (John 1:18). Paul’s doxology in Rom. 11:33 affirms that God’s judgments are unsearchable. He also states in 1 Tim. 6:16 that God dwells in unapproachable light and is beyond the apprehension of human beings.

⁵² Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 110, where he asserts, without any scriptural attestation, that “[i]n the Bible, reason has ontological significance. God is Himself truth and the source of truth. Biblical Christianity honors the *Logos* of God as the source of all meaning and considers the laws of thought an aspect of the *imago*.”

⁵³ Henry, *GRA*, 1:327. Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 91, also states that “the Christian worldview involves not merely an optional theoretical exposition of the totality of things, but also a universally shared prescientific understanding of reality, an understanding that includes a cognitive awareness of God, of other selves, and of the world as an intellectually correlated unity.”

⁵⁴ Henry, *GRA*, 1:328.

a relationship of divine revelation with God *all the time*.⁵⁵ Ironically, therefore, the image of God becomes the basis for the problems of foundationalism and public theology that swallow up the Gospel.

In Evangelical Reformation theology, however, the image of God is understood as original righteousness that was lost by Adam and Eve in the fall (see, for example, Gen. 6:5; Ps. 14:1–3; Jer. 17:9; and Matt. 15:19–20) and can only be regained now in part through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit and then for all eternity in the new creation. Henry, Schaeffer, and Warfield, in contrast, are not running the image of God that way. Henry in particular is using the image of God as an epistemological principle for every area of thought in answer to philosophical questions posed by modernity. Henry’s use of the image of God this way leads him to make the unchristian claim that *all people* know God by revelation just by virtue of being human, by virtue of existing and using their natural faculties. Henry asserts that “[t]he possibility of man’s knowledge of divine revelation rests in the created capacity of the human mind to know the truth of God, and the capacity of thought and speech that anticipates intelligible knowledge and fellowship. Man’s *rationality* is therefore one span of the epistemological bridge whereby he knows *theological* truth.”⁵⁶ Yet, the Apostle Paul says that “[t]he 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” (1 Cor. 2:14), that is, discerned by the operation of the Holy Spirit. If reason is part of the “natural person,” then the Apostle is asserting that natural reason “does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him.” According to the authority of Scripture, therefore, the ground for Henry’s doctrine of divine revelation in the

⁵⁵ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 57. contends that “[e]very human being is aware ... that knowing truth and the good puts one in touch with divinity.... Human beings share these formal aspects of the *imago*.”

⁵⁶ Henry, *GRA*, 1:227, emphasis added. This is synergism if not semi-Pelagianism.

image of God collapses.

In fairness, it should be acknowledged that Henry is on the right track when he states that “[r]evelation itself affirms that man is depraved in consequence of the fall, and that this depravity affects him in the entirety of his being—in volition, affection, *and intellection*.”⁵⁷ Henry must affirm the depravity of human nature, or he would cease to be affirming Evangelical Reformation theology. But Henry creates an inherent problem in his theology when he goes on to assert that the depravity of human nature “hardly means that man cannot *comprehend* God’s revelation, or that he cannot do so *prior to the regenerative or illuminative work of the Holy Spirit*; far less does it mean that man’s rational abilities are wholly nullified.”⁵⁸ At this point Henry is in direct conflict with the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 2:14).

Nevertheless, it might be thought that Henry saves his definition of revelation from the problems of foundationalism and public theology by appealing to verification by Scripture. The issue here is whether Scripture can “verify” revelation as given to reason. In order to do so, Scripture would have to have a meaning independent of such revelation so that Scripture could correct it. If, however, the meaning of Scripture is given by whatever revelation is, then Scripture could not verify such revelation, because its meaning would be given by such revelation. The issue here is where the meaning of Scripture comes from, whether from the text itself in what it says, or from some theoretical framework outside the text. The meaning of Scripture for Henry is provided by his concept of revelation and not by the text. Henry states that “[i]ndispensably important as are the language and words of Scripture, it is not language that ultimately decides the role of thought in revealed religion, but rather thought that controls language.... [T]he

⁵⁷ Henry, *GRA*, 1:226.

⁵⁸ Henry, *GRA*, 1:226, emphasis added.

scriptural revelation presupposes a coherent system of concepts and convictions and not simply symbols of speech and contours of conversation.”⁵⁹ The meaning of Scripture comes from thought. Thought consists of the “coherent system of concepts and convictions,” whatever those are. These are “presupposed” which must mean that they are brought to the text and the text is interpreted through them.

Henry contends further that

[t]he Bible is distinguished by the truths it teaches on the basis of supernatural revelation, not be an interrelated system of technical concepts. Concepts merely as such cannot convey information; concepts gain their meaning from the universe of discourse in which they occur. For historic evangelical theology, the distinctive and authoritative *significance* of biblical concepts stems from their *revelational meaning-content* in the context of intelligible sentences and propositional truths. The authoritative significance of key biblical ideas and motifs is therefore inseparable from the larger theological issue of revelation as a divine communication of truths.⁶⁰

Again, the issue is where the meaning of the text is found. The universe of discourse is a theoretical framework. So, it appears that the Scripture for Henry gets its meaning from a theoretical framework established extra-biblically. Henry asserts that the truths that distinguish the Bible result from “supernatural revelation.” Such revelation could be a reference to the way the biblical text itself was given. In view of Henry’s broader theory of revelation, however, it also means an operation of divine revelation going on immediately in the human mind which is also received by universal reason. That the meaning of Scripture comes from an immediate

⁵⁹ Henry, *GRA*, 3:235.

⁶⁰ Henry, *GRA*, 3:302, emphasis added. Henry’s thinking here seems to be consistent with pietism, which came before in the nineteenth century, though the terminology is different than “revelation” and “faith.” Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 38, explains that pietism found a congruence of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration “distributed equally and evenly” over Scripture *and* the heart and mind of the reader that makes possible discerning “a spiritual sense *above* the ordinary grammatical and logical senses in at least some of the sacred words [emphasis added].” Frei, *Eclipse*, 38, goes on to explain that “the spiritual sense of such individual words lends them to an expanded force or emphasis, so that they have as much meaning and resonance attributed to them as they can possibly bear. ‘Emphasis’ becomes a technical term. It stands for a doctrine or a way of seeing a meaning of scriptural words *quite beyond what they appear to have in ordinary usage or in their immediate context* [emphasis added].”

operation in the mind is suggested because Henry contends that the “authoritative significance” of “biblical concepts” stems from “revelational meaning-content.” Thus, in Henry’s scheme, the significance of the Bible is brought to it from whatever revelation means; revelation does not happen in and through the biblical text such that the text itself is divine revelation. Revelation for Henry is an operation independent of the text. This is evident because Henry states that the authoritative meaning of key biblical ideas and motifs is inseparable from his understanding of divine revelation, since it is divine revelation that communicates truth. As a result, in Henry’s scheme of things, Scripture could not verify his concept of divine revelation since it is divine revelation as given to reason that gives Scripture its meaning.

This conclusion is justified in light of what Henry says about faith. Henry contends that “[f]or Augustine, faith is the mind’s way of knowing. Such faith is *thinking* in view of a higher divine revelatory authority reinforced by assent of the will. Faith is a certitude that, in the light of that higher authority, *proves* and analyzes what is believed and *stipulates* its content.”⁶¹ So, faith is *a way of thinking* that taps into “a higher divine revelatory authority” that is “reinforced” by the will’s assent. This way of talking about faith in relation to knowledge echoes Descartes’ discussion. By tapping into this higher authority, faith can *prove* what is believed and *stipulate* what faith is supposed to believe. This is a much different concept of faith than the Apostle Paul affirms where faith is brought about by the word of God which stipulates faith’s content (Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 15:11). This is not surprising since Henry needs faith to be able to adopt the axioms sitting atop his deductive system of thought without proof. He does not need faith to believe in a promise of the forgiveness of sins. Henry’s concept of faith is not a biblical

⁶¹ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 49–50., emphasis added.

concern.⁶² When his concept of faith is applied to the question of where the meaning of the biblical text lies, the answer would have to be in his concept of faith, which provides meaning to the text. But this just means that the text could not verify and drive faith but is subject to it.

There is another confusion at work in Henry's treatment of Scripture with respect to meaning and verification of revelation when he asserts that "thought controls language" and that language does not decide the role of thought. This confusion becomes evident if we compare the difference between a speaker and a hearer or a writer and a reader. Thought does control language on the side of the speaker or writer in the formation of speech. People use speech to express "thoughts." Searle explains that this comes about by "extrinsic intentionality."⁶³ In contrast, thought does not control language on the part of the hearer of preaching or reader of Scripture, although modern idealism says it does; but this is a mistake. Language controls thought in the hearer and reader since language produces such thought. This is the outside-in way of knowing and what Lindbeck was getting at above, citing Luther.

Henry propounds a serious confusion here because *our* relationship to the biblical text is as reader. Keep in mind that the issue here with respect to Henry's concept of revelation is whether the Scripture can verify revelation as given to reason. Accordingly, the issue involves the reader of Scripture. Since thought for Henry is given by revelation and thought controls language, Scripture could not verify revelation on Henry's terms because such thought that is given by revelation would control the meaning of Scripture. On his terms, the meaning of Scripture is arrived at independently of the text. If Scripture does serve to verify revelation that is given to

⁶² Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 49, where he states that "Augustine's discussion of truth that is sponsored by faith is preceded by an intellectual search for truth; rational inquiry exposes the need to accept certain basic beliefs or principles by faith." Whether Henry is accurately representing Augustine here is not the concern of this project. Henry's statement here is being taken as representing Henry's own thought.

⁶³ See the discussion of extrinsic and intrinsic intentionality in chapter eight below.

reason, however, thoughts must be shaped by the biblical text. Revelation must come *through* the text. Meaning must be what the text says. If, however, Henry applies the statement that thought controls language to the reader, then he is reflecting the view of modern idealism which locates meaning in the hearer or reader and not in the text. In Henry's conception, the hearer or reader brings meaning to the text and the text's meaning becomes whatever that is. Since thought is controlled by his concept of divine revelation, the implication is that the meaning of Scripture for Henry is determined by revelation going on in the hearer or reader, not by the text itself.⁶⁴ The meaning of the text for Henry will be determined by those presupposed and coherent systems of concepts and convictions, whatever they are.⁶⁵ If that system of concepts and convictions is *presupposed*, then that system would constitute a framework independent of the text and brought to it, which becomes the interpretive framework. But this is the way of foundationalism; Scripture must justify itself to an external frame of reference.

Hence, Henry's appeal to Scripture as a verifying principle of divine revelation fails. It fails because the meaning of Scripture is subject to whatever meaning divine revelation and/or faith provide. On such terms Scripture cannot verify revelation but must simply say the same thing that divine revelation says. Scripture must have no other content than whatever revelation as given to reason provides. Scripture must be consistent with reason. Henry's appeal to Scripture

⁶⁴ In contrast, Bayer, *Theology*, 113, contends that "we can avoid [the] danger of secularization [of Christianity] only by refusing to remove the transcendental element of the Christian faith from the medium of language and by locating it instead *in* language [emphasis original]."

⁶⁵ In connection with a prior framework, Henry, *GRA*, 1:384, states that "[t]he revelational view sets out by holding the religious subject and the religious Object in constant relation, since the theological discussion of the *a priori* brings into focus at once the issue of man's direct knowledge of the self, of God (and other selves), and of the physical world, and shows why and how the *a priori* laws carry the thinker into a sphere beyond immanent consciousness." The priority of the framework is suggested in Henry's reference to an "*a priori*." The term "*a priori*" is a technical term in philosophy that means knowing something prior to or independently of experience of the physical object or occurrence. With respect to Scripture, it would mean having some knowledge prior to one's encounter with the biblical text, by which the person interprets the text.

as a verifying principle of divine revelation also fails because Scripture cannot produce faith and faith's content in the hearer or reader on Henry's terms since thought controls language for Henry. What the hearer or reader has decided is meaningful is the authoritative meaning of Scripture. But this is the way of modern idealism and liberalism. It is also the way of subjectivism.

There is an additional problem with Henry's appeal to Scripture for verification of his concept of divine revelation. This has to do with the problem of verification itself. Henry appeals to Scripture because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, which I unreservedly affirm.⁶⁶ In Henry's view, the Holy Spirit put the thoughts into the mind of the human writer that the human writer then wrote down to become the text of Scripture. The problem becomes how to *verify*, in a manner that could satisfy reason or warrants acceptable to a rational, responsible person, that the thoughts in the mind of the writer accurately reflect the thoughts in the mind of God. If Henry is talking about real verification in the interests of providing an indubitably certain foundation for knowledge, then he must be able to conduct such a verification.

But how can human beings undertake such verification, without just trusting the words of Scripture? In other words, how can human beings verify that the thoughts in the mind of the writer of Scripture that are reflected in Scripture were actually the thoughts transferred from the mind of God? In order to do that, a "third something" to which human beings have epistemological access, would have to be able to take an objective position over against God and the minds of the human writers in order to objectively compare the thoughts of God to the thoughts conveyed in Scripture. The only third something Henry could appeal to is universal reason. This conclusion would be justified on the grounds of Henry's theory of revelation

⁶⁶ Henry, *GRA*, 1:229.

because revelation is recognized by reason for Henry and God puts ideas directly into the mind of the human being, as will be shown immediately below. Of course, this is Descartes' epistemological structure. Human reason can verify God's true thoughts because God's thoughts have been put into the mind by God. If universal reason, however, determines whether the thoughts in the mind of the human writer accurately reflect God's thoughts, then the Scriptures become subject to universal, natural reason. But allowing human reason to judge Scripture on the basis of such an epistemology is something that conservative theology could not accept, while it is precisely what has happened in modern liberal theology since Descartes.

How Revelation Takes Place for Henry or the Problem of Subjectivism

In the preceding section, I showed that Henry's account of divine revelation was thoroughly foundationalist along the lines evident in Descartes and other modern idealists. But modern idealism matters not only for the fact of divine revelation in Henry's theology. It also matters in Henry's account of how revelation takes place and operates in the human subject and why. It is contended here that Henry's account of how revelation operates exhibits the same problems of subjectivism that plague modern idealism and liberal theology.

Subjectivism has been described in this project as a way of knowing that works in an "inside-out" manner. Modern idealism is consistent with that because it stems from an account of epistemology where knowledge arises from operations within the ego. In modern idealism the ego constitutes the source of knowledge and determines for itself what it regards to be true and right. Any source of knowledge considered to be external to the ego that could shape faith and thought is considered to be suspect and brought under the ego's critical and evaluative judgment. Ideas are put into the mind from a source that does not involve any factors external to the ego. This way of knowing has its roots in Descartes' *cogito*. In a theological context, where

theological language is used and God is in view, the subjectivism of Descartes' epistemology means that divine revelation occurs by means of an operation of God directly in the mind of the human being. This operation becomes justified on the basis of an anthropology and Christology framed in terms of the image of God and a conception of the divine *Logos*.

In a manner consistent with the inside-out way of knowing, this view of epistemology has implications for the way language works and for sense perception. In relation to the hearer or reader, such a view could not affirm that theological speech could shape the thought and belief of the hearer or reader. In relation to sense perception, such a view maintains that no reliable knowledge can come through the senses. Descartes' doctrine of the RTP comes into view in a formative way.

Henry's theology of divine revelation reflects the epistemology of modern idealism and constitutes an inside-out way of knowing because it asserts that divine revelation takes place within the human subject in an unmediated operation of God, unmediated, that is, by any factor external to the human mind. As a result, Henry argues for a view of revelation that is transcendental. We could call it "transcendental revelation." Revelation takes place transcendently because Henry assumes the RTP, which means that knowledge and meaning must arise from within.⁶⁷ He justifies this way of knowing on the basis that the image of God and a certain doctrine of the *Logos* bridge the epistemological gap brought about by the RTP. The ego, therefore, becomes the source of knowledge along the same lines as modern idealism. But this is subjectivism.

Henry affirms the inner and unmediated nature of revelation when he states the following:

⁶⁷ Incidentally, Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1927), 69, rejects the RTP when he recognizes in a critical manner that "men have been known to reason themselves into the conclusion that the external world has no objective reality and is [nothing] but the projection of their own faculties."

Augustine of Hippo stands unrivaled as the brilliant exponent of the Christian thesis that the knowledge of God and of other selves and the world of nature is not merely *inferential*. Whatever else is contributory to the content of human cognition, this knowledge involves a *direct* and *immediate* noesis [i.e., knowing] because of the *unique constitution* of the human mind. ... Augustine emphasized that truth is primarily found in the intellect alone. Truth must be located in inner consciousness, where reason operates under its own laws and supplies those thought forms without which sensation and experience would be unintelligible.⁶⁸

There are at least three things that are important in this statement with respect to how transcendental revelation operates. First, Henry asserts that knowledge is not “merely inferential.” The use of the word “inferential” means that it cannot arise from experience or observation of any thing external to the mind through the senses. This also means that knowledge happens in an unmediated fashion directly in the human mind. Second, knowledge happens by a direct and immediate knowing in the human mind due to the human mind’s “unique constitution,” as Henry puts it. What the unique constitution of the human mind means will come into view in relation to Henry grounding this epistemology in his anthropology and Christology. Third, knowledge happens in “inner consciousness,” in the intellect alone where truth is located. Knowledge arises from within. Truth is located in the intellect alone pursuant to the intellect’s own operations. In that inner consciousness “reason operates under its own laws” and gives structure to sensation that comes through the senses. If it did not provide such structure, then sensation “would be unintelligible,” in Henry’s view. So, truth resides first in the intellect. The intellect then gives meaning to whatever comes by way of the senses.

As a result, it is evident that divine revelation takes place for Henry in the structure and pattern of modern idealism. It takes place transcendently. Descartes argued that understanding of the physical world was a function of the mind alone operating through pure mathematics. Kant

⁶⁸ Henry, *GRA*, 1:325.

argued that sensation is structured by epistemological structures in the human mind, the “transcendental subject,” “the lawgiver” of nature. Henry strikingly recapitulates this epistemological structure in terms of divine revelation when he contends that truth resides in the intellect alone that provides structure to sensations that come through the senses.

Henry further recapitulates Descartes’ epistemology in terms of divine revelation with respect to Descartes’ contention that God puts ideas directly into the human mind. Henry asserts that “[a]lthough divine revelation opens to us the divine world of ideas, it must contend with the fact that the human mind is not merely passive in the acquisition of knowledge.... The ideas are the changeless reflections of the divine mind.”⁶⁹ Henry additionally states that

[t]he biblical-theistic doctrine of the divine creation of man furnishes Augustine’s framework for the affirmation that the soul received from the intelligible world those forms of thought which make possible man’s orderly and intelligible experience of the sense world.... That man has valid knowledge at all is explained by Augustine on the ground of his creation-link to the supernatural world.⁷⁰

Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley contend, in criticism of Henry, that the purpose of this epistemological structure in Henry’s thought is that the human mind can “think God’s thoughts after Him.”⁷¹

It is interesting that Henry uses Augustine to support his epistemology. Whether Henry accurately uses Augustine is not the concern of this project. Henry’s use of Augustine is taken here to reflect Henry’s own views. Nevertheless, Benjamin Warfield argued that Augustine’s

⁶⁹ Henry, *GRA*, 1:328. Henry, *GRA*, 1:382, states, “The empirical view gains force mainly through the modern neglect of the ontological significance of ideas. The transcendent religious apriorists rightly contend that the desire for a direct knowledge of God is a rational one, and that intuitive consciousness of God is a fact of human experience.”

⁷⁰ Henry, *GRA*, 1:326. Henry, *GRA*, 3:248, also states, “Revelation in the Bible is essentially a mental conception: God’s disclosure is rational and intelligible communication. Issuing from the mind and will of God, revelation is addressed to the mind and will of human beings.”

⁷¹ Sproul, *et al.*, *Classical Apologetics*, 187, explain Henry’s view, by saying that “[a]ccording to presuppositionalism, God enables us to think His thoughts after Him. That is the whole point of his revelation.”

thinking is not the same as Descartes' and Kant's, particularly with respect to the possibility of knowing through the senses. Warfield stated that

[Augustine's] rationalism ... is never pressed to the extreme of conceiving [of] reason as the creator of its own object. That is to say, it never passes into the Idealism which in more modern times has lain so frequently in its pathway. To Augustine the world of observation was far from being merely a 'psychological phenomenon.' Indeed, not only does he recognize the objectivity of the world of sense, but, with all the vigor of [his] contention that we must look within for truth, he insists equally on the objectivity of even the intelligible world. Man no more creates the world of ideas he perceives within him, than the world of sense he perceives without him.⁷²

It appears that, according to Warfield, whatever kind of "idealist" Augustine may have been, he was not a *modern* idealist. Warfield contends that Augustine lived in a "double environment" of the intelligible world and the sensible world, which are not in conflict. Warfield contends further that Augustine "read off the facts of each" and thought of both as objective.⁷³ Thus, according to Warfield, Augustine held to "two modes of knowledge," sense perception and intellection.⁷⁴ In contrast, to the extent that Henry reflects the epistemology of Descartes and Kant, Henry is modern over against Augustine, since Henry does think that the intellect gives shape and constitution to sensation. If Warfield's take on Augustine is correct, then Henry uses Augustine to help solve a modern problem in a modern way, even though the problem he uses Augustine to solve did not exist for Augustine, apparently.

In any event, there is a reason Henry appeals to operations going on directly in the human mind to account for knowledge. The reason is the RTP and its related epistemological problems. That Henry held to the RTP is clear. He states that "we do not and cannot *directly* experience the physical world; our experimental data consists of sensations and neurological impulses."⁷⁵ Henry

⁷² Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*, 140–41.

⁷³ Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*, 141.

⁷⁴ Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*, 141.

⁷⁵ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 72.

is reflecting here the so-called scientific argument for the RTP. He states further that “[t]o affirm that sense perception is basically reliable is unhelpful unless ... a criterion [is provided] for distinguishing reliable from unreliable sensations.”⁷⁶ This criterion must be provided by pure reason. The senses cannot provide reliable information and cannot be a source of truth. Henry reflects modern idealism’s skepticism in these contentions.

Henry’s appeal to immediate operations going on in the ego to provide reliable knowledge is his answer to the biggest problem posed by the RTP in modern thought. This is the problem of skepticism, which arises from the RTP. Recall that the RTP asserts that what a person really “senses” when it comes to sense perception is the “idea” or sense data of an object that resides in the mind, not the object itself. The idea is supposed to resemble its object, while it is asserted that what the mind “senses” is not the object but the idea. As such, the RTP creates the central epistemological problem of modern idealism, which is how to know that the idea accurately resembles its object. This was referred to above as a “truth-gap.” If this truth-gap cannot be bridged, then skepticism must be the result, if the standard of knowledge is indubitable certainty. As a result, a way of bridging this “truth-gap” must be proposed to defeat skepticism. Because this truth-gap is created by skepticism toward the senses, the bridge must be provided transcendently, meaning apart and independent from any sense perception of the external world and occurrences that could happen there. In this way Henry’s theology of revelation is transcendental.

Henry recognizes that the RTP leads to skepticism. Henry states that

[a]fter Descartes’s *Cogito*, the relation of subject and object arises as the primary issue of epistemology. The problem of the agreement and difference of the worlds of thought and of things moves to the center as a dominating controversy of modern

⁷⁶ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 84.

philosophy. The conflict between the subjective and the objective, innate ideas and external images, becomes permanent.⁷⁷

Henry is here reflecting the problem of the relation of the idea to its object. He further identifies the problem of skepticism brought about by the RTP when he states that

[w]hen Pinnock urges us to subscribe to a correspondence theory of truth, which finds truth not in internally consistent propositions but in conformity to external facts, the problems of knowledge-theory multiply. If the human mind cannot know reality itself, but only what corresponds to it, the consequence would seem to be skepticism. If we cannot know reality, then what allegedly corresponds to it will not help us much; unless we can know reality itself, reality is unknowable. And if we can know reality, there is no need to know something else that merely corresponds to it. Such considerations should reinforce the view that truth is a consistent system, and that all facets of it (including all facts) have meaning as a part of that system.⁷⁸

So, we must be able to be certain that thought corresponds to the external facts, otherwise, skepticism is the inevitable result. Henry reflects how the RTP gives rise to the problem of whether the idea accurately resembles its object.

Since Henry assumes the RTP, he too must find a way to bridge the truth-gap. His bridge follows the pattern of Descartes and Kant in finding the solution in the knowing subject, in operations going on in the ego. Like Descartes, Henry must find a way of affirming indubitable certainty because the senses cannot provide it on the assumptions of the RTP. Thus, he finds certainty in a deductive system of thought, like Descartes. Certainty is also found with God placing ideas directly into the mind of the human knowing subject, like Descartes. Moreover truth is found in the intellect where it resides which, pursuant to its own laws, provides structure to sensation, as Kant asserted. Henry calls all of this divine revelation. Henry's theology of revelation follows the pattern of modern idealism and for the same reasons. Henry formulates a theology of revelation to provide a theological answer to modern philosophy's problems. In so

⁷⁷ Henry, *GRA*, 1:302–3.

⁷⁸ Henry, *GRA* 1:237.

doing, however, he brings a subjective epistemology into the methodology of conservative theology in a formative way.

Another way that Henry bridges the truth-gap is by requiring that knowledge take place transcendently, that is, apart from any kind of event or activity taking place in the world. This arises for Henry in a manner consistent with the RTP, as he asserts that “basic beliefs are not empirically inferred.”⁷⁹ He contends that “[w]e screen experiential data through cognitive lenses; we do not grasp sense data as bare or neutral data.”⁸⁰ Things we experience through the senses have no meaning and cannot give rise to theological claims apart from theory. The resurrection of Jesus has no meaning in itself, including whether it really happened or not, apart from the interpreter’s theoretical outlook.⁸¹ This explains his reference to the resurrection of Jesus as a “brute” fact, with no meaning for cognitive claims, since a brute fact has no meaning apart from the interpretation given to it by transcendental revelation given to reason. The important connection here is that Henry’s take on the resurrection results from the RTP, which Henry assumes. But since knowledge cannot be empirically inferred through the senses, just how is knowledge secured? It must be secured “transcendently” so that human beings can “know reality itself.” Henry contends that “[e]mpirical probability can indeed be combined with *inner certainty* when the meaning of specific happenings is *transcendently vouchsafed*, that is, when that meaning is objectively given to reason by divine revelation.”⁸² No historical event has meaning

⁷⁹ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 74.

⁸⁰ Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 74.

⁸¹ See Henry, *Toward a Recovery*, 78, where he contends that “[i]n investigating natural and historical data, what constitutes a fact or event and its probability of occurrence (e.g., of a miracle) is not determined apart from the interpreter’s theoretical outlook.”

⁸² Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority (GRA)*, Vol. II, *God Who Speaks and Shows, Fifteen Theses, Part One* (1976, repr., Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 330, emphasis added. Henry, *GRA*, 1:164, also states, “The Christian revelation contends that the meaning of the cosmos and man and history is *transcendently* given in the form of intelligible divine disclosure [emphasis added].” Indeed, Henry, *GRA*, 1:325, states that

apart from interpretation, and interpretation is vouchsafed transcendently in the inner man. Inner certainty happens transcendently by an unmediated operation of God. Indeed, Henry's theory of revelation boils down to a concept of "rational intuition" which absorbs special revelation.⁸³ Again, such transcendent knowledge takes place by an unmediated operation in which God puts ideas directly into the human mind. The need for this kind of operation arises from assuming the RTP and its related epistemological problems.

These considerations of Henry's concept of transcendental revelation show why the Scriptures cannot serve as verification of divine revelation within his framework of thought. It was argued above that the meaning of Scripture is provided by transcendental revelation. This contention becomes clearer now because knowledge and truth are given transcendently in the inner human being in Henry's concept of revelation. Consequently, the meaning of the biblical text could only be given by divine revelation operating independently of the biblical text in the inner human being. But the problem here is that Henry's transcendental revelation is subjective because truth and knowledge arise from within the ego on its terms. Henry's view of revelation provides no room for the ego being formed and transformed by the text of Scripture and God's physical action in Christ in Word and Sacrament. The ego must, therefore, in Henry's theology become a law unto itself because there is no other epistemological principle in his theology that

"Augustine pointedly emphasizes that by itself the external world is no source of knowledge at all."

⁸³ Henry, *GRA*, 1:75-76, sets forth his concept of rational intuition. Significantly, Henry cites Kant with favor in support of it. Henry, *GRA*, 1:75, explains that "[Kant] emphasized that human knowledge is possible only because of innate thought categories which guarantee the universal validity of human knowledge, and provide the basis for the truths of mathematics." Henry, *GRA*, 1:324, also states, "Treated simply as an explanatory theory, the Christian perspective claims to [have] significance for the whole range of knowledge experience, and to surpass all competitive views in this accomplishment. But the theological transcendent a priori additionally professes a revelational grounding. It comprehends innate knowledge in the context of universal divine revelation and to aprioristic knowledge it *assimilates* special revelation as well. It affirms that men stand everywhere and always in direct knowledge relation to the living God, in virtue of a specific divine origin and preservation. Wherever it is true to its inner spirit, Christian knowledge theory cannot expound that a priori independently of either general or special revelation [emphasis added]."

allows for the ego to be shaped by external factors. Appealing to the Scripture is no help because the meaning of Scripture must also be established transcendentally in the inner human being.

It should also be noted that Henry's affirmation of the RTP also leads to the fact-value split. Henry affirms the fact-value split when he asserts that "[s]o great is the difficulty of demonstrating the infinite from premises about the finite universe that every theory seeking to rise to God from the not-God logically falls back toward agnosticism or skepticism."⁸⁴ In other words, theology (the infinite) cannot arise from anything occurring in the physical realm (the finite universe), the "not-God." Since the resurrection occurs as a physical act in the finite universe, there is no way it could give rise to theology. Theology must be provided by revelation operating transcendentally and independently of the senses and any action of God in the biblical text, physical reality, and sacrament and ritual. As such, the resurrection of Jesus must fall in the category of the "not-God" for Henry since it takes place in the finite universe. This would also include other actions of God in physical reality that are also central to the Christian message and faith, such as, the Virgin Birth, Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, his preaching, his wonders, etc.

It is unfortunate, if not offensive, that such divine acts would have to fall in a category labelled "not-God" just because they took place in physical reality. Since such acts have to do with God obtaining our salvation from sin and death in Jesus Christ, they have everything to do with God. But this implication of the fact-value split arises because of Henry's assumption of the RTP and the modern idealist epistemology he embraces to answer the skepticism created by the RTP.

Subjectivism also arises from Henry's adoption of the RTP in how he uses a certain anthropology and Christology to bridge the truth-gap. The anthropology involves the image of

⁸⁴ Henry, *GRA*, 1:218.

God, as was discussed above. The Christological solution involves Henry's treatment of the *Logos*. For Henry, the divine *Logos* becomes the way to overcome the skepticism and truth-gap that result from the RTP.⁸⁵ The *Logos* becomes the ontological guarantee of knowledge because the *Logos* is treated by Henry as the *epistemological* intermediary between God and human beings. Henry states, "The Logos of God—preincarnate, incarnate, and now glorified—is the mediating agent of all divine disclosure. He is the unique and sole mediator of the revelation of the Living God."⁸⁶ The *Logos* can serve as such because it provides the basis for the Kantian categories in the human mind that are the lawgiver of nature, while the *Logos* also provides the structure of all reality. Henry states, "The ... flaw in Kant's reply to Hume lay in the failure of his ... view of cognition to relate the innate *a priori* factors in human knowledge to the transcendent Logos of God."⁸⁷

The image of God comes in because the *Logos* correlates God, the human mind understood in the sense of universal reason, reality, and objective knowledge for purposes of epistemological certainty. Henry states, "Since the eternal Logos himself structures the created universe and the conditions of communication, logical connections are eternally grounded in God's mind and will and are binding for man in view of the *imago Dei*."⁸⁸ Henry finds an epistemological principle in the image of God because "[t]he *nous* [*i.e.*, mind] of God is not a mental faculty wholly different in kind from the *nous* [*i.e.*, mind] of mankind in its content. Man not merely has the image of

⁸⁵ The word "logos" comes into view in relation to the doctrine of Jesus Christ (Christology) as a result of the first three verses of John's Gospel. There the Apostle John wrote: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). The word "Word" in the English translation of these verses is the translation of the word "*logos*" in John's original Greek.

⁸⁶ Henry, *GRA*, 3:203.

⁸⁷ Henry, *GRA*, 1:392.

⁸⁸ Henry, *GRA*, 3:214.

God but *is* the image of God.”⁸⁹ The *Logos* appears to be able to perform this epistemological task and bring about the ontological continuity between the mind of God and the mind of man because the *Logos* can be, for Henry, both reason or a proposition in God’s mind and reason or a proposition in the human mind. In fact, the word “logos” for Henry really means reason or proposition.⁹⁰ The *Logos*, therefore, constitutes an ontological bridge between God’s mind and the human mind for epistemological purposes—and this means *every* human mind. So, Henry objectifies and absolutizes reason and logic on the basis of a Christology. That is a critical problem since reason and logic have been used in liberal theology to deny the Virgin Birth, the incarnation, the deity of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ from the dead. It is also a critical problem because the *Logos* in Henry’s conception provides the basis for public theology.

Henry’s treatment of the *Logos* for epistemological guarantees leads to two serious problems for Christian theology because of the implications it has for Christology as scripturally and traditionally understood. First, his view of the *Logos* marginalizes and obscures Christ’s work of redemption because the primary theological purpose of Henry’s treatment of the *Logos* is apologetical. For Henry, the *Logos* provides the ontological continuity between the mind of God and the mind of the human being for epistemological purposes relating to God’s existence, the existence of other minds, and the existence and nature of the world. It is a philosophical principle for a philosophical purpose, Christian language notwithstanding. Second, Henry’s

⁸⁹ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority (GRA)*, Vol. V, *God Who Stands and Stays, Part One* (1982; Repr. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 382.

⁹⁰ Henry, *GRA*, 3:483, states, “Some Johannine passages correlate the term *logos* with an explicit verbal quotation, and this contextually identifiable statement removes all doubt that *logos* designates truth to be intellectually apprehended. . . . The *logos* (or *logoi*) is declarative statement intelligible to ordinary men, not to believers only [emphasis added].” Furthermore, Henry, *GRA*, 3:235, states, “Language is a necessary tool of communication, but it cannot effectively serve this purpose unless it defers to the laws of logic. . . . Human language must from the first have been connected with reason and logic.” In addition, Henry, *GRA*, 3:238, states, “*The Logos is the Reason, Logic or Wisdom of God and not a mere element in language analysis. While words depend on speech, Logos does not* [emphasis added].”

apologetic move has a larger consequence for the doctrine of Christ in Christian dogmatics. This is seen in the fact that for Henry the *Logos* operates apart from the incarnation, leaving the status of the person of Jesus in confusion. Henry states that “[w]hile revelation of the *Logos* did take place perfectly in Jesus of Nazareth, *it nonetheless did not take place there either exclusively or completely.*”⁹¹ If, however, the revelation of the *Logos* did not take place exclusively or completely in Jesus of Nazareth, then it did not take place there perfectly. Moreover, if the revelation of the *Logos* did not take place exclusively or completely in Jesus, then the *Logos* could be providing divine revelation apart from the person of Jesus Christ. Henry’s view could, therefore, legitimize a claim to divine revelation that has nothing to do with Jesus, contrary to John 14:9, 1 Tim. 2:5, or Col. 1:15. And then it has the potential of providing a basis for asserting knowledge of God provided by the *Logos* in an immediate operation in the mind of any human being that conflicts with revelation through Jesus of Nazareth that is recorded in the Scriptures. The Scriptures could then be critically subject to such an independent and immediate operation of the *Logos* where meaning is provided by that operation. Henry offers no theoretical basis to preclude this.

The potential exists in Henry’s treatment of the *Logos* of driving a wedge between the Scriptures and divine revelation. Such a result would be consistent with the structure of knowledge found in the RTP and modern idealism, where a wedge is driven between mind and body and the intellect and the senses with respect to how we know things. Henry’s use of Christian terminology notwithstanding, his doctrine of divine revelation reflects the pattern of modern idealism as taught by Descartes and Kant. It is inevitable, therefore, that Henry’s doctrine of divine revelation will lead conservative theology into the problems that result from

⁹¹ Henry, *GRA*, 3:211, emphasis added.

modern idealism, including subjectivism.

Henry's doctrine of divine revelation leads to subjectivism because his adoption of the RTP and his rejection of inference from occurrences taking place in physical reality led to the inside-out way of knowing. In the inside-out way, truth is given or is found in operations or structures taking place in the ego transcendently, apart from any factor external to the human mind, such as God's actions in physical reality and in God's word and sacrament. On the basis of the RTP, the image of God in the human being supports this inner way of knowing because it involves "a certitude of consciousness [that] involves at the same time certitude of the external world."⁹² Henry acknowledges that Descartes used consciousness and God in conjunction for the same purpose.⁹³ Henry's treatment of the *Logos* also supports the inner way of knowing because the *Logos* provides the ontological grounding for the epistemological structures in the mind that structure sensation and, even more than that, provides the ontological basis for an ontological continuity between the mind of God and the human mind. The point is that for Henry divine revelation happens internally through an unmediated and immediate operation of God in the human mind, in any and every human mind, Christian or not. But this is subjectivism, which Henry brings into the heart of conservative Protestant theology through his doctrine of divine revelation.

Descriptive Language and Propositions in American Evangelicalism

The two preceding sections of this chapter examined Henry's approach to divine revelation

⁹² Henry, *GRA*, 1:325, states, "The certitude of consciousness involves at the same time certitude of the external world. The Creator's determination constantly maintains man in this joint relationship to the rational and phenomenal worlds, and to the Creator himself as decisive for all. The soul, like the sense world in which man is placed, has in God its constant support and direction."

⁹³ Henry, *GRA*, 1:307, states that Descartes "substituted the two diverse substances of mind and matter [that] God maintains in interaction by continuous miracle."

and Henry's account of how revelation takes place. These examinations show how fully the concerns, concepts, and aims of modern idealism informed his theology of transcendental revelation. I turn now to Henry's account of the *form* of divine revelation. It is at this point that it might be thought that Henry departs from idealism, because Henry, like other conservative evangelicals, argues that divine revelation is objective and propositional, and *not* subjective and non-propositional, as liberal theology characteristically holds. But when we consider Henry's account of language itself, we can see that it, too, is informed by modern idealism.

For Henry, a proposition is "a verbal statement that is either true or false; it is a rational declaration capable of being either believed, doubted or denied."⁹⁴ A proposition is, therefore, capable of being verified by reason. Propositions are stated in terms of nouns, adjectives, and stative verbs. Propositions have to do with descriptions of the way things are. In theology, they would have to do with statements about the essence of God and Jesus Christ. So, Schaeffer says,

Why should God not communicate *propositionally* to the man, the verbalizing being, whom He made in such a way that we communicate propositionally to each other? Therefore, in the biblical position there is the possibility of verifiable facts involved: a personal God communicating in verbalized form propositionally to man—not only concerning those things man would call in our generation 'religious truths,' but also down into the areas of history and science.⁹⁵

In Schaeffer's view a proposition involves a statement of fact that is verifiable. It is unfortunate that Schaeffer calls this the "biblical position" since it factors out of the Bible and theological language many statements and linguistic expressions that are not subject to verification, such as, miracles, creedal statements, commands, promises, laments, praises, and the like. In any event, propositions have to do with a certain view of theological language that is concerned with accurate descriptions of the essence of things that can be verified by reason. By reducing biblical

⁹⁴ Henry, *GRA*, 3:456.

⁹⁵ Schaeffer, *Christian View of Philosophy*, 1:99–100.

and theological language to propositions, Schaeffer and Henry adopt of a view of language that is rooted in modern idealism.

There are at least three problems with this propositional view of biblical and theological language. The first problem is that it is confused. The confusion becomes evident when we ask about the source of propositions and whether this view of language reflects the inside-out way of knowing. It is not at all clear how a proposition can arise from factors external to the human mind in light of the epistemological framework of divine revelation described above. But if a proposition cannot arise from such external factors, then it must have its source in the operations of the ego. This is an odd result since Henry and Schaeffer would regard a proposition as objective, not subjective. But since Henry's theology of divine revelation, as patterned on the epistemology of modern idealism, affirms an inside-out way of knowing, there is a clear confusion between his theology of revelation and his contention that the form of divine disclosure is propositional. A propositional view of theological language would comport better with an outside-in way of knowing where the human mind is given knowledge from outside itself that can then become the "propositional content" of speech. Henry's theology of transcendental revelation, however, does not support such a view. An unexpected result is that the propositional view of theological language cannot account for how the Scriptures and preaching and teaching, along with the promises and practices of absolution and the sacraments, create and sustain faith in an outside-in manner. At the deepest theological level, what is at stake is whether the ego will remain in the position of judge and jury of propositions or whether God will be viewed as the active agent calling the ego into judgment, bringing it to faith, and shaping what the ego thinks and believes from the outside-in. A propositional view of theological language cannot account for that, at least not in a manner that would be consistent with the

Henry's theology of divine revelation.

A second problem with this propositional view of language is that it is reductionistic in relation to the theological language that is actually found in the Bible and the Christian tradition. The Bible includes commands, promises, confessions, laments, praises, proverbs, parables, and wisdom sayings, and the like. Christian tradition and practice include preaching, creedal statements, absolution, sacraments, rituals, statements of confession, and prayers. The Bible and the Christian tradition also involve "assertives" that relate to the nature of God and "miracles." These sorts of statements or forms of speech do not lend themselves to verification, but to obedience or faith, where faith is understood as trust. Or they are the expressions of faith, conviction, pain, sorrow, or distress, which also cannot be verified in the sense of propositions. Yet, even as the kinds of statements they are—not being verifiable propositions—they are meaningful, teach truth and the knowledge of God and of the human being, and bring the Gospel.

A third problem with this view of propositional language relates to verification itself. The problem is that verification of propositional statements in the Bible pertaining to God or anything else subjects Scripture to the authority of the human mind and its faculty of reason. On Henry's and Schaeffer's terms, verification of a proposition can only take place where human beings are able to compare the biblical statement to whatever it asserts and then engage in a process of judgment to determine whether the biblical statement comports with that to which it refers. In order for verification to take place, the human knowing subject needs to be in a position to determine with indubitable certainty whether the statement is true or false on that basis. If the proposition asserts something affirmative about God, then the human being would have to be in the position of viewing God's nature directly so as to compare the statement to God's nature. Humans, however, do not have such access to God's essence on biblical grounds (John 1:18;

John 6:46; Rom. 11:33; 1 Tim. 6:16). Since truth for Henry consists of an operation in the human intellect, apart from or independent of any external factor or operation, the truthfulness of the proposition would have to be judged according to a subjective epistemology. But in that event, the appeal to propositional language has not avoided subjectivism in the modern idealistic framework of subject-object dualism where the ego determines what is true. This would mean that the propositional view of language as Henry and Schaeffer understand it does not escape the problems of subjectivism. This is an unexpected result, but it seems inevitable when divine revelation is patterned on the epistemology of modern idealism.

Are These Concerns Limited only to Henry?

Reviewing Carl Henry's theology of transcendental revelation has showed just how deeply his theology was formatively influenced by modern idealism. It might be thought, therefore, that the influence of modern idealism on conservative theology really only applies to Carl Henry himself, that Carl Henry was uniquely affected by modern idealism. It might be thought that modern idealism has not impacted conservative theology more broadly because Henry might be viewed as an exceptional case. In that event, one might think that the analysis provided here of modern idealism in the interests of Christian theology could be dismissed since modern idealism has really only affected Henry to any extent to be concerned about.

This project's review and analysis of Henry's theology, however, is important for conservative theology in general for two reasons. The first reason is that Carl Henry had an enormous impact on American evangelicalism. Many evangelicals embraced him and regarded him as a mentor. The second reason is that the epistemological framework of modern idealism could be operating in conservative theology even if it is not exhibited in the thoroughgoing way it is in Henry's theology of transcendental revelation. This can be seen in the theology of Francis

Schaeffer and others to whom I have referred.

Beyond particular persons modern idealism can be seen operating in certain concerns and formulations. Modern idealism begins with skepticism and correlatively requires indubitable certainty. Its skepticism is aimed at tradition and at sense perception. Sense perception comes into theology with respect to God's actions in physical reality in Jesus Christ, either with respect to the things Jesus did at the time of the apostles, or now in our day that Jesus does through Word and Sacrament. Modern idealism is operating where certainty is required with respect to knowing whether God really did things in Jesus (and is doing things in Word and Sacrament), and it seeks that certainty in some framework other than the Scripture and its taxonomy which then verifies Scripture (or disconfirms it) and gives it meaning so that it can be believed. This can reflect the quest for indubitable certainty which must verify occurrences in physical reality from some source other than the occurrence itself. This is the problem of foundationalism. It is also the problem of subjectivism when the verification of the meaning and truthfulness of Scripture is rooted in immediate operations of God in the ego. These operations can be given spiritual and Christian-sounding names. But if they are intended to provide meaning to the Scriptures and the occurrences in physical reality the Scriptures attest to, then the framework of modern idealism could be operating, even if its operation seems minimal in comparison to its influence on Carl Henry. In that event, the analysis provided here from insights of Speech Act Theory has broader applicability than just to Henry's theology.

In addition, there is another way that modern idealism's influence could be present. This is with respect to reducing theological language to propositions for the purpose of conveying verifiable information, to the exclusion or marginalization of promises, commands, and God's speech acts that create institutions. It is evident that Scripture includes many other kinds of

speech acts than is recognized by the reduction of theological language to propositions. It is also evident from the taxonomy of the Gospel that language is used by God in the Scriptures for the purpose of judging and changing us. As a result, Speech Act Theory has a broader applicability than just analyzing the theology of Carl Henry since it opens up to theology a helpful analysis of how God uses language to affect us in an outside-in way that counteracts the subjectivism of modern idealism. In fact, it shows how a propositional view of language does not necessarily escape subjectivism, even though it is usually viewed as objective. As a result, the analysis this project offers can be helpful to conservative theology beyond the concerns that are present in Carl Henry's theology of transcendental revelation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SPEECH ACT THEORY IN CRITIQUE OF MODERN IDEALISM

As was stated at the beginning of chapter one, this paper has two related theses. The first thesis is that modern idealism has had a profound impact on Christian theology, not only for liberal theology, but also for conservative theology. Theologians who could be identified as “liberal,” and theologians, like Carl Henry, who could be identified as “conservative,” assume that they are at odds theologically. This is true at the level of theological *claims*, but not necessarily at the level of theological *method*. This much has been argued before, particularly by postliberal theologians, like Hans Frei and George Lindbeck. A contribution of this dissertation is arguing how modern idealism accounts for the methodological similarities.

The second thesis is that Speech Act Theory, propounded by J. L. Austin and John R. Searle, can be helpful to Christian theology over against modern idealism in specific ways. It is the case that Speech Act Theory is a philosophy of language, and Austin and Searle are philosophers. As a result, this project does use the thought of a certain philosophy and certain philosophers to aid Christian theology over against the philosophical thought of modern idealism. In light of what has been said so far in this project about foundationalism, the reader could be wondering at this point whether using the thought of Austin and Searle as reflected in Speech Act Theory does not recapitulate the problem of foundationalism, where philosophy sets the terms for theology, and, thereby, involve this project in a contradiction. I do not think it does, which I hope will become apparent. But what is implicated here with respect to foundationalism is the relationship between theology and philosophy and how to navigate this relationship. In general, the approach taken in this project to this relationship is akin to how Hans Frei thought Karl Barth articulated it, which was discussed in chapter one. Frei thought Barth held that it is

impossible to do theology without some philosophy because without philosophy “we couldn’t read.” At the same time, however, Frei thought that Barth held that Christian theology must be allowed to speak on its own terms without having to justify itself to a philosophical “super-theory.” Modern idealism functions like a super-theory in a manner inimical to Christian self-description, as has been shown in the preceding chapters. Insights of Speech Act Theory, however, do not have to be used that way and, in fact, have affinity to and support specific features in the taxonomy of the Gospel in a way that modern idealism does not. In addition, Speech Act Theory provides important insights into how to critique modern idealism and de-throne it from being a foundational super-theory imposed on theology.

The fact is that Christian theology and Western philosophy have been closely aligned since at least the second century. At this point in time, Christian theology cannot neatly extricate itself from philosophical concepts, distinctions, and theories, because theology and philosophy have often shared similar concerns and questions. It is frankly a moot question whether theology and philosophy can have anything to do with each other, because they already do. This does not imply that philosophy must be able to contribute to theological questions and problems and *determine* what Christian theology may say. But this does remind us that philosophy might serve as a valuable aid.

The second thesis of this dissertation argues that contemporary Speech Act Theory is a useful aid for theology in contrast to modern idealism. Speech Act Theory is useful in two respects. First, it is conscious and critical of modern idealism in those features that make modern idealism theologically problematic. Speech Act Theory gives Christian theology concepts, distinctions, and vocabulary that can make the problems of modern idealism and features in the taxonomy of the Gospel clearer. I will explain these things in this chapter and the next. Second,

some basic concepts, distinctions, and claims of Speech Act Theory are positively helpful in supporting a theology that is in line with, not opposed to, the taxonomy of the Gospel. I will provide some insight into this in the concluding chapter. The next three chapters involve unpacking these assertions, looking first at the features of Speech Act Theory and how they can provide a critique of modern idealism.

We saw above how Descartes' thought leads to three huge dichotomies, bifurcations, or splits in thought and conceptuality that have posed serious problems for philosophy and theology ever since. One is the mind-body problem. Another is the mind-world dichotomy. Yet, another is the fact-value split. Speech Act Theory provides a way to critique these problems in a way that provides a way forward for theology.

Descartes' treatment of the mind-body problem asserts that mind and body occupy two distinct categories of things that cannot logically be in a causal relationship with each other. This contributes to the fact-value split and also leads to deism and secularism, as was discussed above in chapter five. Moreover, Descartes' treatment of the mind-body problem, in association with his effort to provide a basis in reason for a scientific explanation of the external world, leads to serious reductions in thought. One reduction is epistemological and involves resorting to a scientific explanation of the physical world such that *only* a scientific explanation could be regarded as providing genuine knowledge of what goes on there. This reduction is a problem because scientific reasoning cannot recognize important phenomena that exist in the world and in human existence that cannot reasonably be denied. This reduction also interferes with Christian self-description in Christian theology. Another reduction has to do with what one claims exists, which is a question of metaphysics or ontology. The either/or of the mind-body problem leads inexorably to a metaphysical reduction to either the category of mind or idea, metaphysical

idealism, or to the category of the body or matter, “materialism.” In Descartes’ time materialism was captured with the phrase “forms of matter in motion.” In more contemporary jargon, it is referred to as “sub-atomic particles in fields of force.” The force of the contemporary jargon consists in asserting that only “particles in fields of force” exist.¹ Metaphysical idealism is problematic because it cannot account for a real world of material reality and objects that exist independently of the mind. Materialism, on the other hand, is problematic because it cannot account for the human mind, consciousness, and mental states except on chemical and physical terms, as is evident from the contention that only particles in fields of force exist. This means that materialism cannot account for genuine mental states, whose description cannot be reduced to physical categories and descriptions. It cannot account for faith, hope, and love in the Christian sense as wrought in a person by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5; Rom. 8:16). It also means that materialism denies the existence of the soul (in any way) and of God, understood in the Christian not Cartesian way.

In the mind-world dichotomy, the mind is cut-off from the physical world in Descartes’ concept of “idea” and in his skepticism toward sense perception. These aspects of Descartes’ thought contributed centrally to his concept of the ego as the ground of all thought and being and as coming fully formed into the world without any dependence on or relation to the body and any development from culture and tradition, as Seigel and Kenny pointed out. This leads to the problem of subjectivism where the ego becomes the source of knowledge in a way critical of factors in the world outside the ego, such as tradition, culture, and the external world. As a result, Descartes and Kant theorized that the ego constructs and determines what is real and true, rather

¹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 49, where he says that “the world consists entirely of physical particles in fields of force.”

than being accountable to external factors that could shape and inform it. In other words, modern idealism is rooted in a thoroughgoing skepticism as we saw in Descartes' skepticism toward tradition, culture, and sense perception. This skepticism prohibits an outside-in way of knowing and generates the mind-world dichotomy and subjectivism. On the other hand, when skepticism is rejected, then the mind and factors outside it, like the external world, tradition, and culture, can be brought into a meaningful relationship in important ways that undermines the mind-world dichotomy and modern idealism's subjectivism. This is the opposite of skepticism. So we could put it this way: It is meaningful to contend that the human mind can know the external world as it is. Speech Act Theory supports this contention.

All of these issues are important for theology, not only with respect to the existence of the soul and of God, but also with respect to knowledge, because the Scriptures, when taken on their own terms, unmistakably evince knowing God through God's physical actions in the external world. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is central to this. Modern idealism raises all of these issues for philosophical, scientific, and theological thought. Speech Act Theory can speak to these issues in a way that contravenes modern idealism. Put briefly, Speech Act Theory offers a way to conceive of language and the mind that 1) gives a much fuller account of the uses of human language; 2) refutes the RTP in relation to knowledge and the mind-world dichotomy; and 3) does not assert the ontological dichotomy between mind and matter (including the body) that idealism requires. This account is not only more satisfying philosophically, but it is more congenial and helpful to Christian theology.

This chapter will describe the basic features of Speech Act Theory's account of human language and show how it invalidates Descartes' treatment of the mind-body problem. This chapter will also begin to show how Speech Act Theory breaks down the mind-world dichotomy

with a discussion of intentionality, while the next chapter will complete this showing by way of Speech Act Theory's account of sense perception. The last chapter will apply specific concepts of Speech Act Theory in support of certain features in the taxonomy of the Gospel and in sorting out a specific impasse in contemporary theology.

Some Background

Speech Act Theory arose from developments in the philosophy of language in the twentieth century. Such developments moved away from a long philosophical tradition that thought of language solely in terms of “picturing” reality. This philosophical tradition reaches back to Plato.² It was also prevalent in the modern tradition. The early Ludwig Wittgenstein, writing in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) thought that words stood for objects or ideas in the mind so that the meaning of words was to be found in how well the words “picture” the object or idea.³ This view of language tracks with Descartes' concept of idea where the idea that is in the mind is supposed to be an image or representation of the thing to which it relates. In a similar way, Kant thought that “language is not a reflection of reality, which is inaccessible to human intelligence, but a reflection of our thought about reality.”⁴ Language as picturing reality involves Descartes' view of knowledge where the thinker starts with mental contents in the mind and then infers the external world from those mental contents on the basis of some theory.⁵ Thus, the “picture” view of language is consistent with an inside-out way of knowing. Such a view of

² A. P. Martinich, “Introduction,” in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. A. P. Martinich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3–4,

³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), ¶¶ 2.1–3.01. John Searle, interview with Bryan Magee, “John Searle on Ludwig Wittgenstein,” *The Great Philosophers* on BBC, 1987, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=kl-iLxleHaw>, where he provides a helpful introduction to Wittgenstein's philosophy of language.

⁴ Martinich, “Introduction,” 4.

⁵ Searle, “John Searle on Ludwig Wittgenstein.”

language could be characterized simply as “fact-stating language.”⁶

Austin refers to such a view of language as involving “statements” that are intended to “describe” a state of affairs or to “state some fact” that may be either true or false.⁷ Austin refers to these kinds of statements as “constatives.”⁸ They could also be thought of as propositions, in Henry’s and Schaeffer’s sense. In Bertrand Russell’s terms, descriptive language consists of nouns and adjectives and the verb “to be.” As such, descriptive language in the way of modern idealism does not involve action verbs, in contrast to stative verbs. In a descriptive view of language, speech is not conceived as doing anything *to* the knowing subject, since in modern idealism it is the knowing subject that criticizes and constructs the object. If, on the other hand, language does something to the knowing subject, then it is a false contention that the ego comes fully formed into the world in a manner independent of the body, society, and physical realities. In other words, if language does something to the knowing subject, then the ego has suffered formation through tradition and culture subsequent to coming into the world. Asserting this criticism is not intended to commit an opposite reduction, namely, that there are no features of the human mind that exist in human beings prior to all experience in the inherent constitution of the human being. The fact of the inherent capability for language would itself require rejecting such a reduction. Criticizing the Cartesian ego is to say that the *reductions* inherent in *modern idealism* are not valid. If it turns out that the descriptive view of language is inadequate because of how human beings actually use language, which Speech Act Theory shows, then a different view of the nature of things can be opened up in contrast to modern idealism and its implications.

⁶ Searle, “John Searle on Ludwig Wittgenstein.”

⁷ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 1.

⁸ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 3.

Wittgenstein later changed his view and argued that the meaning of language should not be regarded in terms of how it pictures reality but in terms of usage, where the analogy would be that language is more like a tool.⁹ He argued that language is a rule-governed activity that is intended to accomplish something.¹⁰ Wittgenstein's later philosophy has many implications, but for the purpose of criticizing idealism, it is important to recognize that as a rule-governed activity, language is social. There cannot be a private language.¹¹ A concept of a private language tracks with modern idealism where language pictures ideas or mental objects in the mind.¹² If ideas are purely one's own, then the meaning of language in theory might be entirely subjective, that is, "private." In contrast, Speech Act Theory argues that the rules that govern language must be shared and public phenomena or there is no basis in theory to account for language at all. Hence, the ego—if it uses language—cannot be a solipsistic entity that comes fully formed into the world independent of history, tradition, culture, and experience.

It was Austin who formally developed the view that human beings use language to accomplish something when he introduced the "performative utterance." Austin also did account for "constatives," what Searle calls "assertives." In contrast to modern idealism, however, Austin and Searle have understood constatives as sentences that have certain characteristics *as speech acts*. In other words, in Speech Act Theory, even descriptive sentences function as a use of

⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. O. Anscomb (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953).

¹⁰ Searle, "John Searle on Ludwig Wittgenstein." John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 12, also regards the use of language as a subset of a theory of action because he regards "speaking a language [as] engaging in a (highly complex) rule-governed form of behavior." According to Searle, *Speech Acts*, 12, "[t]o learn and master a language is (*inter alia*) to learn and to have mastered these rules."

¹¹ Searle, "John Searle on Ludwig Wittgenstein."

¹² John Cook, "Wittgenstein on Privacy," *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. A. P. Martinich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 475.

language for a specific purpose, without the baggage of modern idealism's concept of "picturing" reality and its implications.

I will show how a performative view of language calls into question Descartes' core assumptions and conclusions. Moreover, if language is used to accomplish something, then there must be a mind that uses language on purpose in contradiction of materialism, since chemicals and neurons cannot do things on purpose, any more than rocks and dirt, and the forces of gravity and electro-magnetism can. In other words, rocks, dirt, chemicals, and the forces of nature do not have intentionality. An account of Speech Act Theory can show these things.

A Word about the Career of John R. Searle

This project relies heavily on the work John R. Searle in his development of Speech Act Theory, Intentionality, and the philosophy of mind throughout his career. The only purpose of Searle's presence in this project is for his philosophical insights and analysis with respect to these subjects and issues. A brief sketch of his career is important, however, to alert the reader to his credentials and career as an academic scholar and teacher, as well as to the fact that his career ended in allegations of sexual harassment being sustained against him. This will be briefly explained, but first a brief recitation of his career.

Searle was born in 1932. He was the Willis S. and Marion Slusser Professor Emeritus of the Philosophy of Mind and Language and Professor of the Graduate School at the University of California, Berkeley until 2019. He began teaching at UC Berkeley in 1959, where he taught throughout his career. He was well known for his contributions to the philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of society. He received his Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from the University of Oxford. He received many awards for his philosophical work.

In June 2019, however, Searle's status as emeritus professor at UC Berkeley, was revoked for violations of the University's sexual harassment policies. The situation that resulted in Searle's loss of status arose out of allegations of sexual misconduct toward a former student and employee that occurred between July and September 2016. The University of California Berkeley's Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination substantiated the allegations. President Janet Napolitano of UC Berkeley then subsequently revoked Searle's emeritus status and stripped him of all titles as of June 19, 2019. She took this action after receiving the recommendation to do so from the University's chancellor, Carol Christ, who agreed with the findings of the University's Privilege and Tenure Committee of the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate.¹³ There were other allegations of sexual misconduct against Searle. These included, but were not limited to, a lawsuit that was filed in 2017 by a female undergraduate who worked for him at the John Searle Center for Social Ontology. The allegations in that lawsuit pertained to sexual assault, creating a hostile work environment, and retaliation. The apparent facts relating to that lawsuit were quite serious.¹⁴

The issue immediately arises as to how to regard and whether to use Searle's philosophical work. There is currently a debate going on in academia on this precise point in relation to scholars and professors who have been engaged in sexual misconduct and other inappropriate and inexcusable behavior such as racism. Some argue that the work of scholars and professors who engage in such conduct should not be used, relied upon, or acknowledged at all, arguing that using, citing, and acknowledging the work of such scholars only emboldens them in their

¹³ Justin Weinberg, "Searle Found to Have Violated Sexual Harassment Policies (Update with further details and statement from Berkeley)," *Daily Nous: News for and about the Philosophy Profession*, June 21, 2019 at 8:14 a.m., <https://dailynous.com/2019/06/21/searle-found-violated-sexual-harassment-policies/>.

¹⁴ Justin Weinberg, "Sexual Harassment, Assault, and Retaliation Lawsuit against John Searle," *Daily Nous: News for and about the Philosophy Profession*, March 23, 2017 at 2:53 p.m., <https://dailynous.com/2017/03/23/sexual-harassment-assault-retaliation-lawsuit-john-searle/>.

misconduct. There are others who disagree, arguing that their scholarly insights and contributions can be acknowledged so long as their insights and contributions did not involve such misconduct, endorse it, or arise from it.¹⁵ Others argue that universities must choose between whether their goal or purpose is social justice or truth.¹⁶ I am not going to enter into that debate here, except to acknowledge that the debate is taking place.

I have not seen that Searle's philosophical work has arisen from his misconduct. His philosophical work also does not promote, endorse, or defend sexual assault and harassment. Consequently, I am going to use Searle's philosophical insights into Speech Act Theory and the philosophy of mind because, on their own merits, those insights are valid contributions to an important philosophical and theological debate. At the same time, however, I want to state clearly that his conduct was reprehensible and inexcusable and should not have been tolerated. I am also not in any way endorsing his conduct by making use of his philosophical work in this project.

The Performative Utterance

As the label suggests with the word "act," Speech Act Theory is an account of language as human action. It argues that language should be understood as a way of doing something. The notion of language as human action is seen most clearly and most helpfully with the idea of the "performative utterance."

The performative utterance was first formally stated by Austin in the William James

¹⁵ See Conor Friedersdorf, "Truth vs. Social Justice: Academic recognition shouldn't hinge on a scholar's moral character," *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/11/academics-truth-justice/574165/>, where he discusses this debate.

¹⁶ See Jonathan Haidt, "Why Universities Must Choose One Telos: Truth or Social Justice," *Heterodox: The Blog*, accessed Dec. 28, 2021 at 9:28 p.m., <https://web.archive.org/web/20201101002155/https://heterodoxacademy.org/one-telos-truth-or-social-justice-2/>.

Lectures he gave at Harvard University in 1955. Austin was a professor of philosophy at Oxford University in the middle of the twentieth century. Austin's lectures on the performative utterance were compiled in *How to Do Things with Words*. The concept of the performative utterance began with Austin's observation that users of language use it to accomplish things and bring about a new state of affairs.¹⁷ He observed, for example, the provisions of a will, which could state: "I give and bequeath my watch to my brother."¹⁸ He observed operative language in contracts where a party to a contract promises to do something.¹⁹ In a contract to buy and sell real estate, for example, a buyer could promise to pay \$100,000.00 dollars to the seller and the seller could promise to transfer title to the property to the buyer. An example of a performative utterance could also be the "be it resolved" clause in a resolution passed at a church convention, where one finds the language "therefore, be it resolved that ...". Austin also makes the significant observation that physical action, rather than a performative utterance, can communicate something and bring about a new state of affairs, as in ceremonial actions.²⁰ This is significant because it suggests that ceremonial and ritual actions can affect thought, beliefs, and conduct just as speech can.

Christian theologians have referred to Speech Act Theory in terms of the "performative utterance" in theological reflection, though they have not used Speech Act Theory in a thoroughgoing critique of modern idealism. Bayer, for example, has drawn attention to Austin's concept of the performative utterance in relation to the evangelical reformation idea that God's

¹⁷ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 4–6.

¹⁸ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 5.

¹⁹ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 7.

²⁰ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 25.

word does what it says.²¹ The performative view of language supports the Apostle Paul's contention that the preaching of the word of Christ creates faith (Rom. 10:17) and that the Christian is the passive recipient of God's action.²² Nancey Murphy identifies how Austin's thinking leads to a rejection of the foundationalist view of modern philosophy and can change one's perspective on theological language from trying to "mirror or picture reality" to language as accomplishing something.²³ Lindbeck also identifies Austin's work in support of the postliberal use of language.²⁴ In addition, Christian theologians can recognize the performative nature of language, for example, in the creation account of Genesis chapter one, where it states that all things were created in the pattern of God speaking and it coming to be (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24). They can also recognize it in a marriage ceremony where the man and woman saying, "I do," and the pastor or officiant saying, "I now pronounce you husband and wife," makes it so and brings about a new state of affairs in the world. Theologians can also recognize the performative utterance in the pronouncing of absolution or Words of Institution of Holy Communion by the pastor according to the command and institution of Christ whereby sins are actually forgiven and the real presence of Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion is brought about, understanding that the real presence comes about by Christ's power through his words of institution that he speaks by means of the pastor.

²¹ Bayer, *Theology*, 126–34.

²² Bayer, *Theology*, xxiv, 22.

²³ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 95, 111, 114–17.

²⁴ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 51. Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 51, goes on to state that "utterances cannot simultaneously function both performatively and propositionally." This is a significant statement. It is accurate if Lindbeck is trying to contrast a performative utterance with a constative or a proposition in Henry's and Schaeffer's sense of proposition. If that is not what Lindbeck has in mind, then the situation is not so simple because, as Searle will explain, every performative utterance or speech act has "propositional content," though the speech act cannot be *reduced* to its propositional content. The key point in relation to Lindbeck's interests is that recognizing how language is used in a performative manner involves a quite different view of language than seeing it *only* as operating in terms of propositions.

In performative utterances language is being used to accomplish something, not just describe something. As the language accomplishes something, it brings about a state of affairs as stated in the utterance. The language in the will actually results in the watch becoming the possession of the brother upon the death of the testator, the person who made the will. The operative language in a convention resolution actually results in the convention committing the entity that the convention represents to a certain position or course of action. The operative language in the contract to buy and sell real estate actually results in a change of ownership and possession of real property and money at closing. Such change of ownership and possession are recognized as binding by society and government in a society and legal system that recognizes ownership of property by individual people. The seller promises to transfer title and relinquish possession of the house to the buyer. The buyer promises to pay a certain amount of money to the seller in exchange for the transfer of title and the relinquishment of possession. At closing, the buyer causes money to pass from his or her hands into the hands of the seller. The seller causes a deed to the property to be generated and executed by the seller in favor of the buyer. The deed is then recorded in the property records of the local government. The seller then moves out of the house and the buyer moves in. Society and civil law recognize that the house belongs to the new buyer, not the seller, and not to anyone else, and enforces these realities with the power of the state. All of these things are brought about by the speech acts in the contract.

The point is that the performative utterance in the contract changes the physical circumstances. The language of the performative utterance has a causal impact on the world and other people. Such an impact can be *both* mental *and* physical, as the case may be. The performative utterance also involves and can bring about human institutions and social arrangements.

Specific Features of the Speech Act

Having observed this performative aspect of language, Austin identified various types of performative uses of language and gave them the name “performative utterances.”²⁵ The term “speech act” comes from taking into account the entire context of the performative utterance in the sense of the analysis of the components, dynamics, implications, institutions, and logical relations that are involved with it.²⁶ Speech Act Theory pertains to the concepts and elucidations that result from further development of Austin’s insights.

Austin developed the basic terminology of speech acts. The act of simply uttering a sentence he called the “locutionary act.”²⁷ The locution is a sentence in a given language. With respect to how a sentence can be performative, Austin noticed that the locution has “force.” Using the word “force” is intended to capture the kind of performance or action the performative utterance is engaged in, such as, promising, demanding, asserting, describing. Austin named this force the “illocutionary force.” The illocutionary force renders the locution an “illocutionary act.” The illocutionary act brings about the change in the state of affairs in the world. The change in the world is the illocutionary effect.²⁸ When the illocutionary effect consists of a corresponding change in the person who reads or hears an illocutionary act, the effect is called the “perlocutionary” act or effect.²⁹ When the corresponding perlocutionary effect has occurred

²⁵ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 4–7; James Loxley, *Performativity* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 18–19.

²⁶ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 52, where Austin says that “[w]e must consider the total situation in which the utterance is issued—the total speech-act—if we are to see the parallel between statements and performative utterances.”

²⁷ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 94–99, 109; Searle, *Speech Acts*, 24.

²⁸ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 99–109.

²⁹ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 117–18. Searle, *Speech Acts*, 25, states that “[c]orrelated with the notion of illocutionary acts is the notion of the consequences or *effects* such acts have on the actions, thoughts, or beliefs, etc. of hearers. For example, by arguing I may *persuade* or *convince* someone, by warning him I may *scare* or *alarm* him, by making a request I may *get him to do something*, by informing him I may *convince him (enlighten)*,

in the hearer, that is, where the hearer “gets it,” there has been what Austin called “uptake.”³⁰ The relation between the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary effect is causal, that is, the illocutionary act brings about the illocutionary or perlocutionary effect, as the case may be. The causation involved here is not automatic, however, as it would be in physical “billiard-ball” causation, since there is human will involved which cannot be accounted for on materialist terms—materialism is inherently deterministic.³¹ A person could refuse to comply with or resist the terms of the illocutionary act.

Speech acts involve conditions of satisfaction that must be met for a successful speech act.³² If uptake has occurred, the relation between the illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect is “happy.”³³ If uptake has not occurred, then something has gone wrong in the relation between the two. Uptake is not automatic.

Searle adopted Austin’s terminology and basic observations and analyzed them further in the development of Speech Act Theory and a philosophy of mind. He explains how the illocutionary act not only contains the illocutionary force but also “propositional content,” what the illocutionary act is about. For purposes of illustration, suppose the following sentences:

(1) Jerry is riding his bike;

edify, inspire him, get him to realize). The italicized expressions ... denote perlocutionary acts [emphasis original].”

³⁰ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 117.

³¹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 137, where he states, “Typically when I reason from my desires and beliefs as to what I should do, there is a *gap* between the causes of my decision in the form of beliefs and desires and the actual decision, and there is another gap between the decision and the performance of the action. ... The name usually given to this gap is ‘the freedom of the will.’ It remains an unsolved problem in philosophy how there can be freedom of the will, given that there are no corresponding gaps in the brain.” Materialism requires that there be no corresponding gaps in the brain. Thus, freedom of the will is an acute problem in philosophy for materialism. The reader should not confuse the issues going on here with respect to the freedom of the will in philosophy with the issues of freedom of the will in theology with respect to one’s justification before God. They are not the same issues.

³² Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 45

³³ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 45.

- (2) Is Jerry riding his bike?;
- (3) Jerry, go ride your bike!;
- (4) I wish that Jerry would ride his bike.³⁴

Jerry's bigger brother could have spoken sentence (1). Jerry's mom could have spoken sentence (2) to Jerry's bigger brother and sentence (3) to Jerry himself. Jerry's mom could have spoken sentence (4) to Jerry's dad. The propositional content of each of these sentences is that "Jerry rides his bike," but only sentence (1) is actually this proposition. The other sentences do something else though they have the same propositional content. They have different illocutionary forces.

The relation of illocutionary force to propositional content can be expressed in a certain notation that looks like this: $F(p)$, where " F " stands for the illocutionary force involved and " (p) " stands for the propositional content. So the sentence "Jerry, go ride your bike," would be $Mom \rightarrow Command$ (Jerry ride your bike). Though this technical notation will not be used extensively in this paper, a person could analyze many sentences this way. For example, Jesus said, "And I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40). In the notation, this statement would look like this: $Jesus \rightarrow Promise$ (I will raise him up on the last day). This notation will also be useful to show the relation of a speech act to a corresponding mental state.

These sentences show that propositional content alone does not provide meaning to a sentence. Meaning depends on *both* the propositional content *and* the illocutionary force of the sentence, in addition to the context.³⁵ The four sentences show this. Sentence (1) is an assertion.

³⁴ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 22, where he does something similar with four distinct kinds of sentences with the propositional content that "Sam smokes habitually."

³⁵ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 29, where he states, "Stating and asserting are acts, but propositions are not acts. A proposition is what is asserted in the act of asserting, what is stated in the act of stating. The same point in a different way: an assertion is a very special kind of commitment to the truth of a proposition. The expression of a proposition

It asserts that Jerry is riding his bike. It expresses a certain psychological state of the speaker based on observation through the senses, namely, belief that Jerry is riding his bike. It has a direct relation to the world where the knowledge that Jerry was riding his bike *arose from the world*. It could be spoken by Jerry's brother who saw Jerry riding his bike.

Sentence (2) is a question asked by a different person than the one who used sentence (1), Jerry's mom, for example. As a question, it has a much different meaning than an assertion. It is inquiring whether Jerry is riding his bike. It also expresses a psychological state of the speaker that is different than belief. We could call it curiosity or the desire to know. It is quite different from belief because the speaker does not yet know or believe what the state of affairs is. Thus, sentence (2) is not generated by sense-perception but out of the mind, heart, and will of the speaker in a direction *toward the world*. Inquiring could be related to an institution that gives the right and authority to know, such as Jerry's mom having the right and authority to know whether Jerry is riding his bike.

Sentence (3) is a command or an exhortation. It expresses the psychological state of the speaker of wanting Jerry to be conforming his conduct to the propositional content of the command or exhortation, namely, that he be riding his bike. It too is generated out of the mind, heart, and will of the speaker. It expresses a relation of the mind *toward the world* in which it is desired that the world conform to the desire expressed in the speech act. The world reflects compliance with the sentence when Jerry goes and rides his bike. This would be a perlocutionary effect, which Jerry could refuse to do. It could be spoken by Jerry's mom to Jerry.

is a propositional act, not an illocutionary act. And as we say, propositional acts cannot occur alone. One cannot just express a proposition while doing nothing else and have thereby performed a complete speech act. One grammatical correlate of this point is that clauses beginning with 'that ...' which are a characteristic form for explicitly isolating propositions, are not complete sentences. When a proposition is expressed, it is always expressed in the performance of an illocutionary act."

Sentence (4) is a wish. It expresses the psychological state of the speaker wishing that Jerry would do something. Both wishing and demanding could fall under a broad category of desiring. In this sense, sentence (3) and sentence (4) are similar in general terms. Wishing, however, expresses a different psychological state and illocutionary force than demanding or commanding. It could be spoken by Jerry's mom to Jerry or to Jerry's dad.

It is also to be observed that if Jerry complies with sentences (3) and (4) and acts according to them, namely, that he rides his bike, then his action—or we could say the state of affairs brought about by the illocutionary act of the sentence—has the same propositional content as those sentences. It is also to be observed that the sense perception of Jerry riding his bike, which gave rise to sentence (1), has the same propositional content as sentence (1). This is to point out that the propositional content remains constant in the perception of the state of affairs by the senses, the psychological state, the illocutionary act, and the illocutionary or perlocutionary effect, as the case may be. But the type of force and psychological state expressed by the force of the illocutionary act varies, while the perlocutionary effect can also vary. For example, Jerry could have the perlocutionary effect of complying with the demand or wish. If he complies, the perlocutionary effect could be said to have been brought about by the illocutionary force of the speech act. He could also refuse to comply, in which case something else has interfered with the causal connection between the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary effect. In both compliance and refusing to comply, the propositional content would be the same, but Jerry's psychological state would be different. Compliance could be noted like this: Jerry → Complies (ride his bike). Non-compliance could be noted like this: Jerry → not Comply (ride his bike). In both cases, the propositional content remained the same though Jerry's response was quite different. Moreover,

if he complies there has been uptake and the result is “happy.”³⁶ If he does not comply, there has not been uptake, and it could be said that the perlocutionary effect has failed. The propositional content, however, remains the same across the board. Meaning cannot be ascertained apart from illocutionary force on the basis of the propositional content alone. This analysis also shows that the meaning of sentences (3) and (4) resides in the illocutionary act, not in the perlocutionary effect, since Jerry knows quite well what the demand or wish being expressed is, whether he complies or not. In other words, the meaning of the sentence is not determined by Jerry but by the rules of speech that both the speaker and Jerry know.

Important conclusions come into focus. One conclusion is that propositional content alone does not provide meaning to a sentence. Meaning also involves illocutionary force, which then also brings important considerations of context into play. This implication reveals the inadequacy of modern idealism’s descriptive view of language and Henry’s and Schaeffer’s reduction of theological language to propositions. It shows the inadequacy of the viewpoint that once a person has asserted that theological language is propositional, one has provided an adequate explanation of theological language.

Another important conclusion is that the “illocutionary act is the minimal complete unit of human linguistic communication.”³⁷ As Searle contends, the basic unit of linguistic communication is not the “symbol, word or sentence, but rather the production or issuance of the

³⁶ “Happy” here is not intended to be a value judgment on what the sentence was actually commanding and whether compliance with it was a good thing. It is just relating to the conceptuality involved between the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary effect. Hopefully, Jerry would not comply if his mom told him to go and punch his brother on the nose. If Jerry did not comply, as he ought not, then the perlocutionary effect would not be “happy,” with respect to speech act analysis, but it would be the right result. These considerations involve “institutional facts” and “background,” which have not been discussed.

³⁷ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 136.

symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act.”³⁸ It also means that words and sentences have meaning in contexts. This is consistent, in part, with the insight of Gottlob Frege that humans use *sentences* not just *words* to say things and that words have meanings in the context of sentences.³⁹ As a result, the illocutionary act becomes the focus of meaning in linguistic communication and meaning lies in the illocutionary act.⁴⁰

Speech acts can also be thought of as having an “illocutionary point.”⁴¹ “Illocutionary point” can be defined as the point or purpose of a speech act in virtue of the kind of speech act that it is.⁴² The point of a command is to try to get someone to do something. The point of a promise is to put the one making a promise under an obligation to do something for someone else. The point of a description is to make a representation about a state of affairs in the world.⁴³ Recognizing that there is a point or purpose in the illocutionary act serves as an analytical device for understanding what kind of illocutionary force is involved.

An important aspect of the illocutionary act is “direction of fit.”⁴⁴ This concept was present in various speech acts about Jerry riding his bike. Those speech acts involved a relationship of the illocutionary act to states of affairs in the world. The speech act can have a “word-to-world” or “world-to-word” direction of fit. The “word-to-world” direction of fit expresses that the word

³⁸ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 16.

³⁹ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 25. Searle cites Gottlob Frege, *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik: eine logische mathematische Untersuchung über den Begriff der Zahl* (Breslau: Wilhem Koebner, 1884), 73, where Frege says, in German: “Nur im Zusammenhang eines Satzes bedeuten die Wörter etwas.” In English, this means, that “words only mean something in the context of a sentence.”

⁴⁰ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 137.

⁴¹ John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 3.

⁴² Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 147.

⁴³ Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 2.

⁴⁴ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 100–103.

must conform to the world. The “world-to-word” direction of fit expresses that the world must conform to the word. The command that Jerry go ride his bike, for example, has a world-to-word direction of fit because it is the intent of the speaker that Jerry’s behavior (the state of affairs in the world) conform to the command. The sentence that Jerry is riding his bike (a descriptive sentence or assertive) has the word-to-world direction of fit because the speaker’s intention is to express that the propositional content of the sentence conforms to a state of affairs in the world, namely, that Jerry is riding his bike. A speech act can also have a “null” direction of fit if it is just an expression of a psychological state of the speaker without any intention of affecting the world in any way. An example would be the sentence “Oh, I am so happy.”

The terminology of “direction of fit” was invented by Austin.⁴⁵ An example of how it works can be that of a shopping list.⁴⁶ Suppose Bob’s wife gives Bob a shopping list with the words potato chips, baked beans, hamburger buns, and hamburger written on it. From Bob’s wife’s point of view, the list would be an expression of a hope or desire. Bob’s wife wants Bob to get those items at the grocery store. The list, therefore, constitutes a “world-to-list” direction of fit, because Bob’s wife *wants* a state of affairs in the world (Bob actually getting those items) to match the list. Now suppose that Bob runs into Ralph at the grocery store. Ralph sees Bob’s shopping cart. If he could also see the list, Ralph could compare the list to Bob’s cart and see if Bob has put the items of the list in his cart. From Ralph’s perspective, the list would constitute a representation (in a certain way) of how things are supposed to be in the world. The list for him would have a “list-to-world” direction of fit because from Ralph’s perspective, the list is supposed to conform to a state of affairs in the world, the state of affairs being that Bob’s

⁴⁵ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 101.

⁴⁶ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 101–2. Searle got this example from G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959).

shopping cart is actually full of the items on the list. There is a significant difference between how the list functions between Bob's wife and Bob and for Ralph.

These considerations have real world implications because if Bob comes home with sausage, not hamburger, having been given the list with hamburger written on it, Bob will have failed in his errand with result of creating tension between him and his wife. Ralph might also be able to help Bob by comparing the list to his cart and by telling Bob that he has sausage instead of hamburger in his cart.

All of these concepts lead to the concept of "conditions of satisfaction." The conditions of satisfaction involve what needs to obtain for the speech act to be successful.⁴⁷ If Bob gets the items on the list as the list provides, then the speech act comprised of the list becomes successful. If Bob fails to do so, then the speech act has not been successful, or "happy," using Austin's terminology. The conditions of satisfaction are inherent in and known from the speech act itself.

In terms of intentionality discussed below, the conditions of satisfaction being inherent to the speech act can be referred to as "self-referentiality." The conditions of satisfaction, in other words, are not imposed on the speech act from some other speaker or framework external to the speech act and the psychological state that generated it.⁴⁸ The illocutionary force and point, along with the propositional content of the illocutionary act determine the conditions of satisfaction of the illocutionary act.

A question naturally arises as to how many kinds of speech acts there are, as determined by their illocutionary force. There can be many distinct kinds of verbs in any given language that can be analyzed in terms of their illocutionary force. Searle, however, contends that there are five

⁴⁷ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 54.

⁴⁸ An implication of this is that we do not need to account for an illocutionary act by another philosophical framework external to the act itself to give it meaning.

kinds of speech acts, with varying degrees of strength of each kind. These kinds are “assertives,” “directives,” “commissives,” “expressives,” and “declarations.”⁴⁹

The intent of an “assertive” is to present the propositional content as making a representation about a state of affairs in the world. An assertive can be true or false.⁵⁰ Its point is to commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition expressed in the speech act.⁵¹ It reflects the psychological or mental state of belief on the part of the speaker.⁵² It could generate belief as a perlocutionary effect in the hearer or reader. Assertives have a word-to-world “direction of fit,” meaning that what is expressed in the assertive is intended to correspond to a state of affairs in the world. If a hearer or reader in turn believes the assertive, then the hearer’s or reader’s belief has the same propositional content as in the assertive.

The point of a “directive” is to get the hearer to match his or her behavior to the propositional content in the directive. Examples are orders, commands, requests, and wishes, and the like. Directives reflect the psychological or mental state of the speaker as desiring that the hearer do the propositional content in the directive. Directives cannot be true or false in the sense of comparing the propositional content of the directive to a state of affairs in the world, but they can be obeyed, disobeyed, complied with, and the like.⁵³ They can be true or false in terms of a moral analysis, but such an analysis does not involve verification in the sense of comparison to a state of affairs. The direction of fit of a directive is world-to-word, meaning that what is expressed in the directive is intended to bring about a state of affairs in the world in a manner

⁴⁹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 147–52.

⁵⁰ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 148.

⁵¹ Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 12.

⁵² Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 148.

⁵³ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 149.

that corresponds to the propositional content of the directive. If the perlocutionary effect is “happy,” then the compliance of the hearer or reader will have the same propositional content as the directive, and the propositional content will be expressed in the conduct of the hearer or reader.

The point of a “commissive” is to commit the speaker to do what is expressed in the propositional content of the commissive. Examples are promises, pledges, vows, operative provisions of contracts, and the like. Commissives cannot be true or false in the sense of verification, but they can be carried out, kept, or broken.⁵⁴ They could be true or false in the sense of whether the person ought to be committed to the propositional content of the commissive, but that, again, is a different kind of analysis than verification. Commissives involve a “sincerity condition” of the speaker intending to carry out the propositional content of the commissive. The direction of fit of the commissive is world-to-word, meaning that what is stated in the commissive is intended to bring about a state of affairs in the world that corresponds to the propositional content of the commissive.⁵⁵ When the speaker has fulfilled the commissive, the state of affairs in the world will look like the propositional content of the commissive. The perlocutionary effect of the commissive can only be trust or belief that the speaker will carry it out. The propositional content of such trust will be the same as that of the commissive.

“Background” and institutional factors are important considerations in directives and commissives being able to bring about their perlocutionary effects in the hearer. This is the case in the sense of a person having the right, authority, power, or ability to do what the commissive states he or she will do, such as, promising to sell a house while having the right to do so, or God

⁵⁴ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 149.

⁵⁵ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 149.

having the ability to perform the propositional content of a promise.

The point of an “expressive” is to express apologies, thanks, congratulations, condolences, and the like. Their point is just to express the corresponding psychological state of being thankful, sympathizing, etc. In this sense they have a “null” direction of fit.⁵⁶ They involve a “sincerity condition” of whether the person has the psychological state expressed in the propositional content of the expressive. It is taken for granted that the person does have such a psychological state.

The point of a “declaration” is to bring about a change in the state of affairs in the world simply by uttering the declaration. Examples would be, “A state of war now exists between the United States and Japan,” or “I hereby resign my job,” or “I therefore forgive you all your sins.” The world is changed by the propositional content of the declaration. Searle contends that there are two directions of fit involved in declarations. In one sense, there is the world-to-word direction of fit because the world is changed by the declaration. He also thinks, however, that there is a word-to-world direction of fit because the declaration represents the changed state of affairs.

Declarations are heavily dependent upon institutional contexts in which the declaration has validity and power.⁵⁷ For example, when the Congress of the United States resolves to declare war on some other country and issues a declaration to that effect, then the state of war does in fact exist between the United States and that country. Conversely, if I were to say that “war is hereby declared” against another country, no such state of war would exist with that country because I would not have the institutional authority to make that declaration. I could utter the

⁵⁶ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 149.

⁵⁷ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 150.

sentence, but it would have no effect. The same sort of analysis could be applied to the declaration “I forgive you all your sins,” where the authority to make that declaration relates to an institutional prerogative of the pastoral office in the context of the Christian church.

It is important to observe that neither directives nor commissives are true or false like a proposition could be true or false as subject to verification. The issue here is verification. Directives and commissives in principle are not subject to verification by the hearer prior to the hearer either obeying the directive or believing the promise. This is because directives and commissives in their illocutionary force are not in the form of stating that such and such *is* the case in the world. Instead, they reflect how the speaker wants such and such *to be the case* in the world. The world conforms to the command or promise when the command is complied with, or the promise is fulfilled. Thus, there is a fundamental difference between a descriptive sentence and a directive or commissive. The descriptive sentence is concerned with how things are in the world. The directive or commissive is concerned with how things will be or should be in the world. For this reason, we might say that directives and commissives are relational in nature, because they require the hearer to have a certain relationship to the speaker. The directive calls on the hearer to obey or comply with the speaker. The commissive calls on the hearer to trust or have faith in the speaker. Directives and commissives could be regarded as “true” in the sense that the one making the command or issuing the promise is trustworthy and good and should be obeyed and trusted. But such a concept of truth has nothing to do with propositions in the way that Henry and Schaeffer treat propositions.

This analysis of the difference between directives and commissives, on the one hand, and assertives, on the other, shows that Henry’s and Schaeffer’s contention that theological language consists properly of propositions is inadequate. Speech Act Theory shows that the meaning of a

sentence cannot be determined by its propositional content alone but must also consider its illocutionary force. It also shows the importance of context. This shows how Henry's and Schaeffer's account of theological language as merely propositional constitutes a reduction—and sometimes an abstraction when context is ignored—in that it fails to account for the illocutionary forces involved in theological speech acts that are essential for the meaning of those acts. The reduction is also apparent when verification is brought into view since commands, promises, and declarations cannot be subject to verification in the way that Henry and Schaeffer run verification according to modern idealism. Since commands, promises, and declarations are not subject to verification, they are unaccounted for and excluded by a theology of revelation that is shaped by modern idealism. Such a theology, as exemplified by Henry, tends to be primarily interested in metaphysics and knowledge of the world in a manner consistent with the interests of modern idealism (as a transcendental philosophy) and science (as relating to forms of matter in motion). But such a theology of revelation cannot account for commands, promises, and declarations. Henry and Schaeffer want verification to take place on Cartesian terms, that is, either according to pure rationality or on the basis of the natural sciences. They engage, therefore, in the reduction in theological language in the sense of not accounting for commands, promises, and declarations.

There is no way, however, for a promise from God to be verified on those bases because neither reason nor science could verify God's sincerity in making the promise nor could they verify it after fulfillment of the promise since the promise must involve something that would not be expected to occur in the ordinary course of nature, something for which science is not able to account.⁵⁸ Moreover, a command by God could not be verified by reason or science because it

⁵⁸ That the propositional content of a promise involves something that is not expected to occur in the ordinary

has to do with expected conduct of human beings, not with how mathematics governs the forms of matter in motion. In other words, the fact-value split could not permit Henry to account for a command since modern idealism, which Henry assumes, has already divided reality up into facts and values with a chasm between them, while knowledge of how the world works on scientific terms cannot account for values.

In addition, the propositional account of language fails to consider that the speaker of a command, promise, declaration, and even an assertive, is trying to bring about a state of affairs in the hearer or reader such that the ego is meant to suffer some action which results in some change. This leads to the ironic result that the propositional view of theological language is stuck in the subjectivity of the Cartesian ego, even though it claims to be objective, while the account of language provided by Speech Act Theory, which recognizes illocutionary force, breaks down that subjectivity and provides an account for how the ego can suffer God's action. These considerations show the inadequacy of a merely propositional account of theological language.

Speech Act Theory Dissolves the Mind-Body Problem and the Mind-World Dichotomy

Having set forth the nature of speech acts, it can now be explored how speech acts can provide a way to criticize and invalidate the contentions, assumptions, and implications of modern idealism. Speech acts can provide this criticism because they contravene the mind-body problem and the mind-world dichotomy. Modern idealism distinguishes sharply between the mind and the body, and between the mind and external reality. The reason for this distinction is a thorough-going skepticism, exemplified by Descartes. It is because Descartes could not doubt that he was doubting that he gave priority to the thinking mind. Speech Act Theory begins in a

course of nature will be explained in chapter ten.

different place: with the assumption that it is impossible to deny that people are speaking, writing, and using other signals to make assertions, ask questions, make promises, and issue commands, and that other people are accepting the assertions, responding with answers, trusting in promises, and obeying commands. Modern idealists, to be sure, would respond characteristically with an assertion of skepticism, by contending that this assumption is debatable and therefore to be rejected. Proponents of Speech Act Theory proceed as though the assumption that any claim to knowledge must be established with indubitable certainty were invalid. They make no attempt to meet that standard of certainty because that standard otherwise rules out of account the kinds of undeniable things people actually do with language and the kinds of institutions that exist in human society. In this regard, Speech Act Theory is like other forms of post-foundationalism in rejecting how skepticism leads to solipsism, such as Bertrand Russell, who said:

As against solipsism it is to be said, in the first place, that it is psychologically impossible to believe, and is rejected in fact even by those who mean to accept it. I once received a letter from an eminent logician, Mrs. Christine Ladd-Franklin, saying that she was a solipsist, and was surprised that there were no others. Coming from a logician and a solipsist, her surprise surprised me.⁵⁹

Cartesian skepticism generates the question: Why should anyone require metaphysical certitude for all claims to know something or to say something is true? But operating free of this Cartesian constraint opens up a very different account of the mind, the body, and the external world.

This can be seen at first in relation to the mind-body problem. Contrary to the mind-body problem, the speech act shows that mind and body are in a causal relationship with each other.

This contention arises from the observation that the speech act brings about physical effects, as

⁵⁹ Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948), 180. The point is that a solipsist by definition cannot be sure of the existence of any other human beings, with the result that Mrs. Ladd-Franklin could not even express surprise that there were no other people who held her view of solipsism and be consistent.

with a contract to buy and sell real estate, for example. The mind comes into it because the speech act is generated by a human mind using language, which we will come into view under the theme of “intentionality” below. A speech act involves certain intentions on the part of the human being using language.⁶⁰ The body comes into it because of the state of affairs in physical circumstances that are affected by the illocutionary force of the speech act. The point is that there is a causal connection between the mind and the world in speech acts that contravenes Descartes’ dualism and its subsequent reductions. We can see this connection between the mind and the speech act in the relationship between the psychological state of Jerry’s mom wanting Jerry to ride his bike and the state of affairs in the world that Jerry would be riding his bike, as exhibited in the speech act, “Jerry go ride your bike.” The demand that Jerry go and ride his bike was generated by the psychological state of his mom wanting Jerry to ride his bike, and she hopes that the state of affairs in the world, including Jerry’s mind and body, will conform to her demand. When Jerry’s mind and body conform to her command, there is a causal relation between Jerry’s mom’s psychological state and the world.

In such a way, the speech act shows that the human mind is in a causal relationship to the body and the physical world in contravention of Descartes’ theorizing about the relationship between mind and body. This is a critically important implication of Austin’s concept of the “performative,” where he states that “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something.”⁶¹ This causal connection is also evident in the relation of mind to the body itself, since the speech act involves physical actions of the body. A speech act involves the movement of the components of the mouth, lungs, and diaphragm to

⁶⁰ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 16.

⁶¹ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 6-7.

make sound, not to mention all of the complicated physical things going on in the brain and the nervous system. If the speech is in writing, the speech act involves the entire process of moving arms, hands, and fingers to make marks on paper, as well as all the processes going in the brain and the nervous system. When it is recognized that the mind's intentionality brings about a change in Jerry's behavior through his mom's speech act, an entire causal chain comes into view in the speech act from mind to body to the utterance itself to physical circumstances in the world. This causal chain defies the break in causation between mind and body posited in modern idealism. And in these contentions, when the word "mind" is being used, a mental state is in view that cannot be explained by a reduction to chemicals and physical processes. Thus, the performative utterance, by its nature, involves the human mind in a causal relationship with the world.

An important result of this causal chain for Christian theology is that deism loses its theoretical foundation in the mind-body problem. It was discussed above how Descartes' treatment of the mind-body problem leads to deism since the theoretical inability of mind and body to interact causally renders it impossible to account for how God could act in the physical world. This is deism. To the extent, however, that the speech act undermines the causal separation inherent in Descartes' treatment of the mind-body problem, the speech act undermines the theoretical basis of deism. This result is good for Christian theology.

Since the speech act connects the mind to the body and the physical world causally, it also treats the mind as in a direct, *epistemological* relationship to the world that defies the mind-world dichotomy of modern idealism. In the promise to pay \$100,000.00 for a house in a contract to buy and sell real estate, there is a direct connection between the promise and the physical transfer of \$100,000.00 into the possession of the seller. Thus, there is a direct transaction between the

mind and the physical circumstances. There is also knowledge in this transaction coming through sense perception. This knowledge is expressed in the propositional content of the contractual promise to pay, which is “buyer pays \$100,000.00 to seller.” The actual transfer of \$100,000.00 to the seller will show up as physical in some manner that can be observed by the seller and the buyer with the senses. As a result, the mind is in a direct and knowing relationship with the world. This will be developed further in the next chapter in relation to the critique of the RTP.

Speech Act Theory Invalidates Eliminative Materialism and a Reductive Scientific Account of All Reality

Modern idealism’s metaphysical distinctions between mind and body and between mind and world promote an “eliminative materialism,” that is, an account of the world as purely matter, and gives priority to “reductive scientific explanations.” “Eliminative materialism” refers to an extreme materialist position that goes as far as to deny the existence of consciousness and maintains that there “really aren’t any such things as beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, etc.”⁶² “Reductive scientific explanations” refers to explaining phenomena as purely processes. These are “reductive” in the sense that they reduce everything, including the mind, consciousness, ideas, desires, etc., simply to the action of inert, valueless particles and forces. These reductions are of particular interest since they dominate academia today. Searle’s explication of Speech Act Theory shows the invalidity of these reductions in three ways.

Keep in mind that the only thing that will be shown here is that the *reduction* to a scientific explanation of all things is invalid. It is not the purpose here to invalidate scientific knowledge and reasoning completely. The term “reduction” pertains to using scientific explanation for *everything* such that if something cannot be accounted for purely on the basis of physics or

⁶² Searle, *Rediscovery of the Mind*, 6.

chemistry, then it either must not exist or must not count as genuine knowledge. Speech Act Theory shows this sort of radical reduction to be invalid.

Reductive Scientific Explanations Cannot Account for Human Speech Itself

First, Speech Act Theory shows that reductive scientific explanations cannot account for the phenomenon of speech at all. Spoken speech involves the generation of sound by the human mouth (including the lips, teeth, tongue, and jaw in conjunction with the diaphragm that pushes air through it). The mouth produces discrete sounds that mean something from one human being to another in human speech. Written speech involves how the human hand produces marks in ink or pencil lead on a piece of paper. I am also producing images of human speech electronically in the shapes of letters and words on my computer screen as I type this. Scientific explanation can only analyze the physics and chemistry of the sound waves, the ink or lead on the paper, and the computer technology. Such analyses, however, have nothing to do with the *linguistic meaning* of the sounds, the marks on paper, or the blips on my computer screen and *cannot* have anything to do with such meaning. That is to say that reductive scientific explanation cannot provide an account of how the sound waves and marks on the paper are used by human beings to communicate meaning in human speech and to do the things speech acts do in the world. The issue is as Searle queries: “How do we get from the physics to the semantics?”⁶³ Searle explains the problem when he states that

[w]hen I take a noise or a mark on a piece of paper to be an instance of linguistic communication, as a message, one of the things I must assume is that the noise or mark was produced by a being or beings more or less like myself and produced with certain kinds of intentions. If I regard the noise or mark as a natural phenomenon like the wind in the trees or a stain on the paper, I exclude it from the class of linguistic

⁶³ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 135–36.

communication, even though the noise or mark may be indistinguishable from spoken or written words.⁶⁴

The point is that reductive scientific explanations of all phenomena to their most basic components like particles in fields of force cannot account for the human intentions that generate linguistic communication and turn physical sounds and marks on the page into human speech.

Reductive Scientific Explanations Cannot Account for Human Institutions

Second, the considerations regarding reductive scientific explanations of speech acts can also be applied to human institutions with the same result, namely, that scientific explanations cannot account for human institutions. It cannot reasonably be denied that human institutions exist objectively and function causally in human life and society. As Searle puts it, the question becomes how there can be “causal efficacy to the institutional reality of money, governments, universities, private property, marriages,” and such, in a physical world composed of chemical elements and natural forces.⁶⁵ Consider money and the institution of economics, for example. Money takes the form of paper and ink, metal coins, and bits of information in a computer system composed of “bytes.” Like speech itself, these things could be analyzed from the standpoint of physics and chemistry. Analysis of the chemistry and physics of a piece of paper, however, does not and cannot answer the question as to what makes a dollar bill money.⁶⁶ The analysis of physics and chemistry does not provide any explanation as to how paper and ink can function as means of payment in commercial transactions. It does not account for how a person can take a dollar bill down to the local convenience store and buy a Snickers candy bar with it. As a result, human institutions involve an entire dimension of human existence that cannot be

⁶⁴ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 16–17.

⁶⁵ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 114.

⁶⁶ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 112.

explained by a reduction to scientific analysis. In fact, reductive scientific analysis cannot account for how such institutions arise in the first place, since they arise from speech acts.⁶⁷ It is additionally significant that though the origins of human institutions cannot be explained in terms of physics and chemistry, such institutions involve physical things and bring about profound physical effects in the physical world. The same can be said of many other institutions, such as, baseball games and churches. In terms of Christian self-description, the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion also cannot be accounted for on the basis of physics and the physical properties normally attributed to physical bodies. Yet, they exist by virtue of Christ's speech acts in the Gospels and have profound meaning for Christians, scientific analysis notwithstanding.

Reductive Scientific Explanations Cannot Account for Human Consciousness

Third, the analysis of how reductive scientific explanations cannot account for speech acts and human intentions can be applied to a most important consideration when it comes to the human mind. This has to do with the phenomenon of consciousness. The same question arises, which is how there can be consciousness if it is assumed that all that exists is particles in fields of force. The problem can be brought to light by considering that science has to do, theoretically, with the "objective" existence of things in the world, such as mountains and trees, photons and neurons. Use of the word "objective" here means that "their existence does not depend on being experienced by a [human knowing] subject."⁶⁸ As a result such things are accounted for in terms of "third-person" descriptions. It could be said that they have a "third-person ontology." That is to say that mountains and trees have a third-person mode of existence in relation to human

⁶⁷ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 115.

⁶⁸ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 43.

beings.⁶⁹

Consciousness, however, cannot be accounted for on the basis of a third-person ontology. Consciousness involves “states of sentience or awareness” of a living, conscious human subject.⁷⁰ Rocks, mountains, trees, sound waves, paper, ink, computer screens, and the like, do not have sentience and awareness. Consciousness involves qualitative *subjective* states of a human being. Conscious states are “subjective” because it is a person that has them.⁷¹ We do not share each other’s consciousness. As a result, it could be said that consciousness has a “first-person ontology,” that is, a first-person mode of existence. As a result, neither science nor materialism can account for consciousness, because consciousness is accounted for on completely different terms.

A clarification of how the words “objective” and “subjective” are being used here is needed, because the word “subjective” is being used in relation to consciousness. As such, it may seem that Speech Act Theory posits the same sort of subjectivism of Descartes’ thought, which this paper is arguing against. The words “objective” and “subjective,” however, are being used here in terms of *ontology*, that is, existence, not in terms of *epistemology*, that is, how we know what we think we know. There is a critical difference. The difference between ontology and epistemology can be seen if we consider sentences that assert that such and such is the case. In terms of epistemology, such a statement could be either objective or subjective. If such a

⁶⁹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 43–44.

⁷⁰ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 40–41. I presume by “sentience” Searle means having the power of perception. Note that it is not being said here that consciousness is awareness in the sense of the mind having an idea of itself as in Descartes’ thought. In other words, Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 68, is not describing consciousness in terms of the mind as subject observing itself as an object as with other things like tables and chairs. Such Cartesian conceptuality of the mind observing itself as an object like a table or chair actually breaks consciousness apart.

⁷¹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 42–44.

statement is *epistemically* objective, it means that “it can be known to be true or false independently of the feelings, attitudes, and prejudices of people.”⁷² If such a statement is *epistemically* subjective in terms of how we know what we think we know, it means that it is a matter of personal opinion.⁷³ For example, a statement that says that Rembrandt was born in 1609 is epistemically objective in terms of epistemology because the year in which Rembrandt was born is not a matter of personal opinion and can be, theoretically, determined to be true or false depending on when he was actually born. A statement that says that Rembrandt was a better painter than Rubens is epistemically subjective in terms of epistemology because it is a matter of personal opinion.⁷⁴ However, when it is said that consciousness has “first-person ontology,” an analysis of whether sentences are true or false is not going on. Searle explains that “[w]hereas the epistemic sense [of the terms of objective and subjective] applies to *statements*, the ontological sense refers to the *status* of the *mode* of existence of types of entities in the world.”⁷⁵ To say that consciousness has a “first-person ontology” is just to say that it has a first-person mode of existence in contrast to the third-person mode of existence of rocks, mountains, trees, and molecules. By using the terminology of “first-person ontology” to try to explain how scientific explanation cannot account for consciousness, it is not being asserted that consciousness is a matter of personal opinion. Rather, it is to assert that consciousness is experienced by a human being and involves qualitative states and sentience and awareness that dirt, rocks, mountains, trees, and atoms do not have and do not experience. But since consciousness has an ontological status, consciousness is something that really exists. The point

⁷² Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 44.

⁷³ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 44.

⁷⁴ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 44.

⁷⁵ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 44, emphasis added.

is that since consciousness has a “first-person ontology,” it cannot be accounted for in the way that science accounts for the physical universe. Scientific explanation cannot account for consciousness, which is to say that the reduction to scientific explanation is shown, again, to be invalid.

Using the terminology of “first-person ontology” with respect to consciousness is also not meant to suggest that consciousness is subjective in the sense that conscious states cannot be observed and known by others. Certainly, if I have a pain in my foot, the pain itself cannot be known by another person. If I wince in pain, however, another human being can observe that and ask: “Are you in pain?” Moreover, it may be thought that feelings such as anger, displeasure, or happiness could not be “objectively” known since it is a person that has such feelings. As Searle points out, however, “other people are frequently in a better position to know that the [person] has the feeling than the [person] who is experiencing the feeling.”⁷⁶ This is to say that though conscious states exist in a human subject, such that they have a “first-person ontology,” they are not necessarily subjective in the sense of other people being unable to know that they exist. They can be known to exist by others because of a corresponding physical action or expression. Here again there is a connection between mental states and the body which evinces a connection between mind and body for which Descartes’ treatment of the mind-body problem cannot account. Here again, the Cartesian bifurcation between mind and body collapses.

Nevertheless, the overall point in this discussion of consciousness is to show that science and materialism fail to account for consciousness, which is a definitive aspect of being human. Human consciousness exists. Its existence, however, cannot be accounted for on the terms of science and materialism. Searle points out that the first-person ontology of consciousness “makes

⁷⁶ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 43.

it impossible to reduce it to objective third-person phenomena in the way that we can reduce third-person phenomena such as digestion or solidity.”⁷⁷ Searle observes that once we have accounted for the chemical processes in the brain and subatomic particles like quarks and muons in relation to neuro-biology, there is still “a phenomenon left over” that is not accounted for by that chemical and subatomic analysis.⁷⁸ Therefore, reduction to scientific explanation is rendered invalid and science is relativized because it cannot account for an entire dimension of human existence. Materialism is invalid because consciousness exists, yet it cannot be accounted for on materialist terms.

Mental States and Intentionality

Speech Act Theory, especially as developed by Searle, implies a definite account of the mind in general, and consciousness in particular. This became clear when distinguishing different illocutionary forces in speech acts, because the different forces call for different psychological states in the hearer. Eliminative materialism denies or explains away consciousness and psychological states as purely physical or chemical processes. But, as has been pointed out already, the materialism of modern science is devoid of meaning and value. So, the very idea that language involves meaningful signs is discounted. Searle argued against eliminative materialism precisely because it cannot account for language and our minds. This led him to develop a distinctive philosophy of mind. In this section, I will elaborate on his account of a philosophy of mind in relation to the mind’s features and connections to speech acts. The reason for doing so, in the interests of this dissertation, is to show that Speech Act Theory’s account of mind and language supports an “outside-in” way of knowing that is consistent with a

⁷⁷ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 57.

⁷⁸ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 55.

taxonomy of the Gospel.

These features of the mind involve genuine mental states like desires and beliefs. These features also involve intentionality. According to Searle, an important feature of consciousness is that “it is just a plain fact about how the world works that our conscious mental states function causally in the production of our behavior.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, the “sentience and awareness” of consciousness is not a solipsistic sentience and awareness; it is sentience and awareness *of* things. As Searle states, “there is an essential connection between consciousness and the capacity we human beings have to represent objects and states of affairs *in the world* to ourselves.”⁸⁰ For lack of a better term, this capacity of consciousness is called “intentionality” in the philosophical discussion.

The word “intentionality” is intended to refer to “that feature of the mind by which mental states are directed at, or are about or of, or refer to, or aim at, states of affairs in the world.”⁸¹ It captures the concept that one’s “beliefs and desires must always be about something.”⁸² Searle explains that “[i]f ... I have a belief, it must be a belief that such and such is the case; if I have a fear, it must be a fear of something or that something will occur; if I have a desire, it must be a desire to do something or that something should happen or be the case.”⁸³ As a result, Searle contends that “the primary ... role of the mind is to relate us in certain ways to the environment, and especially to other people.”⁸⁴ He goes on to state that “our subjective states relate [us] to the

⁷⁹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 62.

⁸⁰ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 64, emphasis added.

⁸¹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 64–65.

⁸² Searle, *Intentionality*, 1. Searle makes a distinction here between some mental states that are not about anything and beliefs, hopes, fears, and desires that are. The kinds of mental states that he thinks do not have intentionality are such things as nervousness, elation, and “undirected anxiety.”

⁸³ Searle, *Intentionality*, 1.

⁸⁴ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 85.

rest of the world, and the general name of that relationship is ‘intentionality.’”⁸⁵ So Searle contends that “[a]s far as coping with the world is concerned, the important feature of consciousness is that it is essentially tied to intentionality.”⁸⁶

Intentionality relates to human speech because it is what gives meaning to the physical sound waves and marks on a page. Searle states that “[w]hen I take a noise or a mark on a piece of paper to be an instance of linguistic communication, as a message, one of the things I must assume is that the noise or mark was produced by a being or beings more or less like myself and produced with certain kinds of intentions.”⁸⁷ This is because they have to be performed on purpose with a goal and according to certain constitutive rules in order for the physical characteristics of speech to have meaning.⁸⁸ Thus, illocutionary acts can only be performed with intentionality.⁸⁹

There is a logical order to this analysis. Intentionality comes first, logically speaking, since “the intentionality of language already depends on the intentionality of the mind.”⁹⁰ There is an order of discovery in the sense that the speech act has led back to the rediscovery of the intentional mental states of the mind in a way for which science and materialism cannot account. But having rediscovered consciousness and intentionality by first recognizing the speech act, there is an order of logical analysis which goes from the intentionality of the mind to the speech act. Searle states that the “direction of pedagogy is to explain Intentionality in terms of language;

⁸⁵ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 85.

⁸⁶ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 83.

⁸⁷ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 16.

⁸⁸ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 141.

⁸⁹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 136–37.

⁹⁰ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 90.

the direction of logical analysis is to explain language in terms of Intentionality.”⁹¹

The logical order of intentionality of the mind to the speech act results in an important distinction. This is the distinction between “derived” and “intrinsic” intentionality. Speech acts and all linguistic meaning have “derived intentionality.” The intentionality that the mind has in its mental states is “intrinsic intentionality.”⁹² Searle explains it like this:

Since sentences—the sounds that come out of one’s mouth or the marks that one makes on paper—are, considered in one way, just objects in the world like any other objects, their capacity to represent is not intrinsic but is derived from the Intentionality of the mind. The Intentionality of mental states, on the other hand, is not derived from some more prior forms of Intentionality but is intrinsic to the states themselves. An agent uses a sentence to make a statement or ask a question, but he does not in that way *use* his beliefs and desires, he simply has them.⁹³

The sounds that come out of one’s mouth and the marks on the page are physical phenomena. They have no linguistic meaning as just physical phenomena. The meaning of the sounds and marks on the page is provided by the intentionality of the mind that constructs the sounds and the marks on the page according to the rules of the language. The mind, therefore, has intrinsic intentionality because the intentionality involved in the speech act is original to the mind which knows the rules of human language and forms speech acts according to such rules.⁹⁴

The difference between intrinsic and derived intentionality involves a further distinction between “presentation” and “representation” in Searle’s analysis. The sounds, characters, words, and sentences that make up speech can be regarded as just objects in the world with no about-ness. When an agent uses them in speech, however, they are about something and their

⁹¹ Searle, *Intentionality*, 5.

⁹² Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 141.

⁹³ Searle, *Intentionality*, vii, emphasis original.

⁹⁴ It is even more profound that the particular features of the human body involved in speech have the ability to form very precise sounds in following the intentionality of the mind according to the rules of language. We could say the same thing about the other parts of the body that are involved in writing.

relation to that something is “representational” in a certain sense. For example, when a person uses the word “chair,” that person uses it to stand for the chair in the sentence “Go sit in that chair.” This involves intentionality because the word “chair” stands in a relation to the chair and about the chair that consists of a “referring to.” When a person *sees* the chair, however, the person is not using a representation that stands in for the chair; the person is seeing the chair. In the sentence, the intentionality could be spoken of as “representational.” In the intentionality of sense perception, however, the intentionality could be spoken of as “presentational,” which is intended to capture the fact that the object is presented directly to consciousness through sense perception.⁹⁵

It is important not to confuse the use of the term “representation” in Searle’s analysis with the sort of representation occurring in the RTP and in Descartes’ concept of idea. In the RTP, the idea of a chair represents the chair in the sense that the idea is an entity of some kind that stands between the chair and the mind. The idea also represents the chair in that it is supposed to resemble the chair.⁹⁶ Searle’s account of intentionality does not operate that way. The term “represent” in Searle’s usage is just intended to capture the constellation of terms and concepts involved in unpacking how the intentionality of the mind is directed to the world, such as, direction of fit, propositional content, psychological mode, and conditions of satisfaction.⁹⁷ In Searle’s understanding, the word “chair” stands for the object in speech but has no correspondence to the object itself in any ontological way as resemblance. The word “chair” does not picture the chair. The word “chair” represents the chair in intentionality because it is *about* the chair.

⁹⁵ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 61.

⁹⁶ Searle, *Intentionality*, 11–12.

⁹⁷ Searle, *Intentionality*, 11–12, 45.

The “directed-ness” or “about-ness” of conscious mental states—their intentionality—can be described as having certain features. Searle discusses these features in terms of propositional content, psychological “modes” of the mental states, direction of fit, and conditions of satisfaction. In this way, analysis of speech acts informs an analysis of intentionality. Searle adds “intentional causation” to these features to account for the relationship of the intrinsic intentionality of the mind to the derived intentionality of speech acts.

With respect to the mode of the intentional mental states, Searle contends that “every intentional state consists of propositional content in a certain psychological mode.”⁹⁸ This seems evident. Psychological modes could be belief or hope, for example. If I believe something, that which I believe is the propositional content of the belief. For example, a person could have a belief that the sun will shine tomorrow based on the weather forecast or a hope that the sun will shine tomorrow as an expression of desire. Belief and hope both have the same propositional content “that the sun will shine tomorrow.”⁹⁹ The belief must be *about* something, that is, that the sun will shine tomorrow. The hope must also be *about* something, that is, that the sun will shine tomorrow. But belief and hope are different psychological modes, though they have the same propositional content in this example. One could then wake up in the morning and see the sun shining. The visual experience of seeing the sunshine would have the same propositional content as believing that the sun is shining. As a result, belief, hope, and sense perception can all have the same propositional content though the visual experience is a different conscious state than the belief and desire, based on the distinction between representation and presentation. The belief or hope would be an instance of representation. Seeing the sun shining would be an instance of

⁹⁸ Searle, *Intentionality*, 11.

⁹⁹ Searle, *Intentionality*, 6.

presentation.

There is a technical notation that can be used for an intentional mental state such as belief, just as there is for speech acts. For example, Henry's belief that the sun is shining can be noted like this: Henry \rightarrow Believes (or Bel for short) (the sun is shining) where "Believes" or "Bel" stands for the psychological mode of belief, and the sentence in the parentheses is the propositional content. This notation is handy for showing the parallelism and connection between the intentional mental state and a corresponding speech act. If the belief that the sun is shining generates an assertion that the sun is shining, the notation could look like this: Henry \rightarrow Bel (the sun is shining) generates Henry \rightarrow Assert (the sun is shining). The psychological mode of the mental state of belief corresponds to and produces the illocutionary force of the speech act, an assertion, while the propositional content is the same. The propositional content in this instance was generated by seeing the sun shining, which became the propositional content of the belief, which then became the propositional content of the speech act by means of derived intentionality.

In addition, the psychological mode of the mental state corresponds to the "sincerity condition" of the speech act. Thus, if a person makes a statement to the effect that "the sun is shining," that person commits himself or herself to the truth of the propositional content that the sun is shining.¹⁰⁰ Commitment to the truth of the propositional content constitutes the "sincerity condition" of that particular speech act. Searle regards the connection between the psychological mode of the mental state to the sincerity condition of the speech act as a generalization of Moore's paradox such that a person cannot state that the sun is shining without believing that it

¹⁰⁰ Searle, *Intentionality*, 9.

is shining.¹⁰¹ Thus, Searle states that the “performance of the speech act is *eo ipso* an expression of the corresponding Intentional state; and, consequently, it is logically odd ... to perform the speech act and deny the presence of the corresponding Intentional state.”¹⁰²

As in the explication of speech acts, intentionality also has a “direction of fit.” Searle explains that “different types of intentional states relate the propositional content of the state to the real world with, so to speak, different obligations of fitting.”¹⁰³ If a person believes that the sun is shining, then that belief will be true or false depending on whether the sun is shining. That person’s belief must “fit” the world. This is a “mind-to-world” direction of fit, where the belief must correspond to the world.¹⁰⁴ If, on the other hand, one hopes that the sun will shine tomorrow, then one is hoping that the world will fit one’s hope. This constitutes a world-to-mind direction of fit, where the world would be said to correspond to the hope.¹⁰⁵ So, intentional states also have conditions of satisfaction. The conditions of satisfaction are satisfied if there is a match between the propositional content of the requisite intentional mental state and the world.¹⁰⁶ As Searle asserts, “Conditions of satisfaction are those conditions which, as determined by the Intentional content, must obtain if the state is to be satisfied.”¹⁰⁷

Searle also discusses intentionality in relation to “intentional causation,” which refers to the fact that “[i]t is essential to the functioning of intentionality, and indeed essential to our survival in the world, that the representing capacity of the mind and the causal relations to the world

¹⁰¹ Searle, *Intentionality*, 9.

¹⁰² Searle, *Intentionality*, 9.

¹⁰³ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 100.

¹⁰⁴ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 101.

¹⁰⁵ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 101.

¹⁰⁶ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 103.

¹⁰⁷ Searle, *Intentionality*, 12–13.

should mesh in some systematic way.”¹⁰⁸ Intentional causation captures the fact that the mind is “in constant causal contact with the world.”¹⁰⁹ This contact is seen in the performative utterance where the illocutionary force of the utterance changes the physical circumstances in the world. Intentional causation, therefore, also has directions of fit. If a person has the intentional mental state of being thirsty and, accordingly, has the intentional mental state of causing one’s body to do all of things that are needed to get a glass of water, there is intentional causation going on between one’s mind and the world in a world-to-mind direction of fit. In sense perception, however, the real world is causing the visual experience. In that case, the direction of fit is mind-to-world where the intentional contents of the sense perception must correspond to the world.

Another important feature of Intentionality is that it is “self-referential.”¹¹⁰ Searle explains that if “I ... drink water by way of satisfying my desire to drink water, then my mental state, the desire (that I drink water), causes it to be the case that I drink water. The desire in this case both causes and represents its condition of satisfaction.”¹¹¹ It is, therefore, “self-referential.” Sense perception is also self-referential.¹¹² In Searle’s conceptuality this means that “the conditions of satisfaction of perceptual experience require that the state of affairs perceived functions causally in producing the perceptual experience. So the conditions of satisfaction require reference to the experience itself.”¹¹³ We can take all of these features to mean that the mind is directly related to the world in sense perception and in speech acts. There is no mind-world dichotomy operating in

¹⁰⁸ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 105.

¹⁰⁹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 104.

¹¹⁰ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 105.

¹¹¹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 105.

¹¹² Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 5.

¹¹³ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 5.

Speech Act Theory, which is to say that if speech acts are real, then there really is no mind-world dichotomy in reality. If sense perception were *not* self-referential, then there would be an idea or sense datum to which the mind refers in between the mind and the world. If the intentionality that generates a speech act were not self-referential, then it would be like positing that the mind imposes intentionality on its own mental state, which would make the mind an object to itself as a subject. Such a scheme, however, breaks up the unity of consciousness. It would require another mind within the mind imposing intentionality on the mind, but this is absurd. Such a scheme results in breaking down the directness of intentionality that we have seen from the analysis of the speech act as it leads back to the mind. This break down is present in modern idealism. Searle uses the term “self-referential,” therefore, to capture the concept that the mind does not use itself as an object and that there is no third thing involved in sense perception between the mind and the world such as an idea or sense datum.

A Word about Searle’s Own Metaphysical Commitments

The preceding section not only offers a counterproposal to idealism with respect to the mind and language, but it holds some genuine value for theology. I will explore this value in the concluding chapter, after a further discussion on Speech Act Theory against the RTP that is characteristic of modern idealism. Before going further, however, I do not want to give a false impression to the reader that Searle himself is a Christian or a theist. He is not. Searle himself actually believes that the world consists entirely of particles in fields of force.¹¹⁴ He is, in fact, committed to the theory of evolution, as he says, for example, that “the primary *evolutionary* role of the mind is to relate us in certain ways to the environment, and especially to other people.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 33–34, 49; Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 222–23.

¹¹⁵ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 85, emphasis added.

He takes for granted that atomic theory in physics and evolutionary theory in biology are true, or at least “are not seriously in dispute among educated members of our civilization.”¹¹⁶ He argues that consciousness arose out of natural selection because humans need consciousness in order to survive.¹¹⁷ One wonders, however, how consciousness could have arisen from chemicals and how natural selection could have produced language in the first place, since Searle explains quite well how speech and consciousness cannot be explained on the terms of reductive scientific explanations. Searle’s own metaphysical commitments and his account of how reductive scientific explanations cannot account for speech, institutions, and consciousness appear to be in conflict. Considering Searle’s own metaphysical commitments, the reader could understandably wonder how Searle’s thought could be helpful to theology in any respect.

Searle’s thought is helpful because, in spite of his own metaphysical commitments, he is insightful in unpacking the connections and implications of the speech act, and then the mind and intentionality, as we have seen. He does so in a way that actually goes against his own metaphysics because his findings regarding the mind contradict the reduction to particles in fields of force. Searle has his own way of trying to reconcile his findings regarding the mind and his metaphysics in a way with which this author does not agree, though these issues are not the focus of this paper. Nevertheless, the connections and implications of the speech act that Searle unpacks are useful to Christian theology, and they stand as they are irrespective of Searle’s own metaphysical views.

In fact, a person could substitute God where Searle speaks of evolution, and it would not change Searle’s analysis of speech acts and the mind at all. One could say, for example, that the

¹¹⁶ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 62–63.

primary role that *God* gave the human mind “is to relate us in certain ways to the environment, and especially to other people” and one would have an entirely appropriate theological statement, as well as all the benefits of Searle’s analysis set forth in Speech Act Theory.¹¹⁸ Or one could say, for example, that God gave human beings consciousness in order to survive and one would once again have said something appropriate to the Christian faith. Indeed, it is more meaningful to assert that God gave human beings consciousness, since then one could also affirm that there is more purpose involved in consciousness than just mere survival. One could then go on to assert an account that supports human dignity and relational factors, both with God and other human beings, in so many ways and dimensions, for which natural selection cannot account. Holding that God gave consciousness to human beings, therefore, says something much richer than evolution can say.¹¹⁹

In any event, Searle’s analysis of the performative utterance and Speech Act Theory stands. Ignoring Searle’s commitment to evolution and gleaning his analysis of the speech act and the human mind, the Christian theologian can learn much that is helpful to theology, especially over

¹¹⁸ Regarding evolution, Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 4, states, “I think the universe exists quite independently of our minds and that, *within the limits set by our evolutionary endowments*, we can come to comprehend its nature” [emphasis added]. It is interesting how Searle sets those two statements side by side and how theology would agree with the one and not the other. Christian theology should agree that the universe exists quite independently of our minds. Of course, Christian theology does not agree with evolution. But it is also interesting how Searle uses the word “endowment.” This word suggests something given, that is, gift. The Christian theologian could substitute God for evolution in Searle’s statement and capture the reality of the First Article of the apostles’ Creed based on Genesis chapter 1, such that the endowment would be given by God. Of course, Searle does not do that because he really believes in evolution. Yet, Searle’s use of the word “endowment” as something given is interesting in terms of what it suggests of his understanding of how to do philosophy. Philosophers must take what is given and explicate, not create. He just happens to hold that attitude in relation to evolution. He could just as well have said that the endowments were given by God. In either case, his posture of doing philosophy would be the same and the ego would be called into question as not being the lawgiver of reality.

¹¹⁹ Evolutionary theory cannot say anything about how consciousness arose due to the distinction between first-person ontology and third-person ontology discussed above. It also has nothing to say about the human dimensions of relationships because chemicals do not exhibit purpose and values in those ways and do not form emotional attachments. In effect, Searle ascribes to evolution “god-like” volitional capacities and makes it function in a creative capacity like God, even though evolution is not a thing, a being, or a purposive force at all, and chemicals have no creative capacity.

against modern idealism and its reduction to the absoluteness of scientific explanation and materialism. It turns out that the speech act contradicts the reduction of all reality to science and materialism in a way that benefits theology, and Searle does an excellent job of showing this, though, of course, not in the interests of theology. The fact that Searle can do this while holding metaphysical views that his own analysis of Speech Act theory calls into question lends credibility to his analysis. It also turns out that the speech act and its implications have affinity with many phenomena in a taxonomy of the Gospel, though Searle himself would be surprised by this. Searle's philosophy of Speech Act Theory is valuable because it involves taking what is given and working out the implications and connections.

Christian theologians, working in pursuit of Christian self-description, may be able to learn a lot from Searle in terms of how he does philosophy as they engage with the facts of the Christian revelation as provided in the Scriptures. Searle's way of doing philosophy as applied to theology would mean that the theologian must take the Christian facts as given and work out the meanings and implications in a humble manner. Christian theologians in the modern age, however, have learned to do theology in the way that modern idealism does philosophy; yet Searle does philosophy in a way that contravenes modern idealism. He takes what is given and uses logic to explicate rather than to magisterially try to construct all reality.

Incidentally, the way Searle tries to reconcile his own findings regarding the mind with his materialistic assumptions is to contend that consciousness is just one biological function like any other, such as, digestion. Searle says, for example, that "[w]e know for a fact that all of our conscious states are caused by brain processes" so that "consciousness is a biological phenomenon like any other."¹²⁰ Searle is not consistent, however, because he also says that

¹²⁰ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 51.

consciousness cannot be adequately explained on the basis of biology because the first-person ontology of consciousness resists reduction to third-person phenomena like digestion.¹²¹ In addition, Searle identifies the problem of the “freedom of the will” and how it remains an unsolved problem in philosophy because philosophy cannot account for “how there can be freedom of the will, given that there are no corresponding gaps in the brain.”¹²² By this comment, Searle is just recognizing in a particular way the irreconcilability of freedom of the will with the inherent determinism of materialism, since in materialism whatever “will” could be construed to be would be subject to the determinism of natural laws and physical and chemical processes, thus cancelling out both will and freedom. As a result, on Searle’s own account it cannot be the case that all our conscious states are caused by brain processes. There is something more mysterious going on with consciousness than just biological process.

Searle dislikes that mystery, and he is quintessentially modern in this respect. He also dislikes mystery with respect to any talk about a “soul.” But why rob human beings of their mystery? Humanity is not in a better place when the mystery of consciousness and its relation to the body is eliminated by a reduction to biology. On the other hand, Searle is certainly correct to identify that modern idealism has tended to break the human being apart, like Descartes did, because logic cannot handle the mystery that the human being is. The Cartesian bifurcation of the human being has shown itself in bad ways in theology in the modern age, as we have seen. While consciousness cannot be reduced to biology on materialist terms, consciousness is still intimately combined with the brain in ways that defy logic. Searle is at least right to affirm that consciousness and the brain are combined in a way that resists and transcends logical analysis.

¹²¹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 57.

¹²² Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 107.

As a result, the Christian and Christian theologian have one more reason to marvel at God for what He has done in creating such a remarkable creature called the human being. What Descartes did to the human being in his magisterial use of reason breaks the human being apart in a way that is contrary to the facts and not Christian. Any theological construct that reflects the Cartesian bifurcation of the human being is just as problematic to Christian theology as Searle's commitment to evolutionary naturalism. Searle correctly recognizes how Descartes broke the human being apart. He then tries to account for how the speech act shows how mind and body are inextricably interrelated and intertwined, even if his naturalistic solution to the problem of consciousness is not satisfying on Christian terms. His proposed solution to the problem of consciousness, however, does not vitiate his analyses of speech acts, consciousness, intentionality, and sense perception, which analyses can be quite helpful to the Christian theologian in the pursuit of Christian self-description in relation to a taxonomy of the Gospel.

This explication of the speech act by Speech Act Theory has shown important things that are helpful to Christian theology over against the foundationalism of modern idealism. It has shown that the speech act, which is an undeniable fact of human life and society, and so, Searle would say, an undeniable fact in the world, breaks down the mind-body problem and the mind-world dichotomy, along with their attendant problems and reductions. It has shown how Speech Act Theory can relativize science to allow room for the embracing of phenomena that exist objectively in the world for which science cannot account. These results are quite helpful to Christian theology over against the foundationalist deterioration of the Christian faith brought about by modern idealism. In addition, there is "paydirt" for Christian theology in Searle's account of intentionality. The "paydirt" for theology consists in understanding the structure of intentionality in terms of sense perception, intentional mental states, conditions of satisfaction,

and speech acts and the connections between them. Searle provides conceptuality, analytical connections, and vocabulary that can help explain and support features that exist in the taxonomy of the Gospel. This will be discussed in chapter ten. It is enough to point out here that Searle's development of Speech Act Theory shows how these connections cannot be accounted for on the terms of the RTP and the bifurcations and dichotomies of modern idealism. Speech Act Theory makes evident, therefore, that modern idealism cannot serve legitimately as the foundation for theology. These contentions will be further developed in the next chapter which provides a critique of the RTP and a presentation of Searle's account of sense perception in terms of "direct realism." To this discussion I now turn.

CHAPTER NINE

AN ANALYSIS OF SENSE PERCEPTION

I turn now to a direct analysis of the accounts of sense perception provided by Descartes and the modern idealist tradition, on the one hand, and by Austin and Searle from the standpoint of Speech Act Theory, on the other. The account by Descartes and the modern idealist tradition involves the RTP and phenomenalism. The account by Austin and Searle is a realist account, which Searle refers to as “direct realism.”

Why this Analysis of Sense Perception Is Needed and Helpful for Theology

I have been arguing in this project that modern idealism can pose huge problems for conservative theology—as for liberal theology—by shaping such theology according to modern idealism’s assumptions and its inside-out way of knowing. One of the most important assumptions of modern idealism that leads to its inside-out way of knowing and the *cogito* is its *skepticism*. It is skeptical toward any knowledge coming from tradition, authority, and culture. It is also skeptical toward knowledge that could come through the senses. Such skepticism drives the knowing subject back toward itself as the ground and source of knowledge and posits an inward way of knowing. This is what modern idealism is all about. Truth must first be found and derived from within somehow. But this shows that skepticism, especially toward sense perception, leads to the mind-body problem and the mind-world dichotomy, as well as the subjectivism of the *cogito*. The *cogito* and the mind-body problem in turn lead to the fact-value split. All of these features of modern idealism pose huge problems for Christian theology as viewed from the standpoint of the taxonomy of the Gospel.

These features of modern idealism are at work in Carl Henry’s theology of revelation where he speaks of God putting ideas directly into the mind of the human being and truth being

established by *inner* certainty pursuant to structures in the human mind, echoing Cartesian-Kantian epistemology. Since Henry also adopts the RTP, it is not surprising that he needs to find certainty of knowledge in operations going on in the ego and posits a way to justify that. That is to say that he too assumes skepticism, and his theology of revelation is his epistemological solution to the epistemological problems brought about by skepticism and the RTP. Henry's account of knowledge is an antirealist account. As a result, the mind-body problem, the mind-world dichotomy, and the fact-value split are operating in Henry's theology of revelation as unexamined presuppositions. This is exhibited in his inability to find meaning in a physical event—and we could also say Scripture—without that meaning being brought to the event from somewhere else. The problems brought about by modern idealism's skepticism are also exhibited in Henry's need for a deductive system which is not focused on God's actions in physical reality but in a mathematical way of knowing within the mind. Deduction provides certainty for Henry, and he thinks that all of the "historical events" in the Scriptures can be spun logically out of the axioms sitting atop the system. Accordingly, Christian claims can be put on an indubitably certain foundation, even though that foundation is a rationalist one. Thus, the epistemology of modern idealism shows itself in his concept of truth as consisting of operations in the intellect and inner certainty, which is to say that truth must come transcendentally, away from anything physical. This causes a distortion in Christian theology because it tends to take the revelation of truth away from God's actions in physical reality, including the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the text of Scripture, and God's actions in the institutions of the Gospel. But this is to say that the *cogito*, the mind-body problem, the mind-world dichotomy, and the fact-value split are already assumed and operative, since truth, for Henry, could not come from the "not-God" as perceived by the senses. This is all to say that an antirealist account of

sense perception is operating in Henry's transcendental revelation. As such, his account of revelation is out of step with the taxonomy of the Gospel, for the taxonomy exhibits an outside-in way of knowing through God's operations in physical reality as perceived by the senses. As such, the way of knowing exhibited in the taxonomy is a realist position with respect to sense perception.

Since the taxonomy of the Gospel exhibits realism when it comes to sense perception, it would be helpful to theology to provide a critique of modern idealism's antirealism to extricate conservative theology from the confusions and distortions that modern idealism causes for the Gospel. If modern idealism's skepticism toward sense perception can be discredited, then a vital theoretical basis for modern idealism's epistemology would be dissolved. Then the way would be opened for Christian theology to move forward on its own terms pursuant to the features found in the taxonomy of the Gospel, since it does not operate on the basis of the subjectivism of the *cogito*, the mind-body problem, the mind-world dichotomy, and the fact-value split, which are tenets of modern idealism.

The purpose of the previous chapter, this one, and chapter ten, therefore, is to apply the insights of Speech Act Theory to the tenets of modern idealism so that Christian theology can move forward on its own terms without operating on modern idealism's assumptions and without having to justify itself to modern idealism's requirements. In the previous chapter, the analysis of the speech act was used to dissolve the mind-body problem and the mind-world dichotomy, in part. An analysis of the RTP is needed to complete the dissolution of the mind-world dichotomy because our examination of Descartes' thought showed that the RTP leads to the mind-world dichotomy pursuant to Descartes' notion of "idea," which leads in turn to the "veil of ideas" that cuts the mind off from the world. The focus of this chapter is to bring the RTP under direct

scrutiny, to complete the dissolution of the mind-world dichotomy, and to argue for a realist, non-skeptical view of sense perception. Toward that end, this chapter explores how Austin and Searle analyze and criticize the RTP and how Searle argues for “direct realism.”

Criticizing and discrediting the RTP is also important because it has been pervasive throughout the modern era in both philosophers and theologians. The RTP is held in common among such diverse philosophers and theologians as Descartes, a rationalist, A. J. Ayer, a logical positivist, Søren Kierkegaard, an existentialist in theology, and Carl Henry, a deductivist, rationalist, conservative evangelical, who rejects existentialism and logical positivism. The RTP also undergirds the subjectivism of the ego as the determining factor of all reality. Even more importantly, the RTP renders it impossible for philosophical thought to account for having a shared world with a shared language and trans-subjective human institutions. Additionally, in the skepticism of the RTP, modern idealism asserts a general theory of truth to which all particulars must conform, as is the case in Descartes and later in Hegel and modern historical critics.¹ If, on the other hand, the senses provide direct access to the world, then particulars cannot reasonably be subsumed or ignored by a general theory because they can then become “stubborn” facts.²

What is at stake for Christian theology is affirming the actual, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and everything that follows from it with respect to theological claims and the Gospel as seen in the taxonomy. If Jesus was not seen, through ordinary sense

¹ Hegel, *Reason in History*, 15–16, where he states: “In world history the ‘individuals’ that we have to deal with are peoples; they are totalities which are states. We cannot, therefore, be satisfied with what we may call this ‘retail’ view of faith in Providence, nor with the merely abstract, undetermined faith in the universal statement that there is a Providence, without determining its definite acts. On the contrary, we must seriously try to recognize the ways of Providence, its means and manifestations in history, *and their relations to our universal principle*” [emphasis added].

² Russell, *History*, 825–26, where he comments on John Dewey’s view of truth as a result of Hegel’s influence that “Dewey’s divergence from what has hitherto been regarded as common sense is due to his refusal to admit ‘facts’ into his metaphysic, in the sense in which ‘facts’ are stubborn and cannot be manipulated.”

perception, as actually, physically living again after being dead, then no further Christian claims could be made with respect to God and the Gospel that are consistent with Christian self-description. This is because the apostles in the taxonomy of the Gospel assert that they saw Jesus alive again through the senses and that doing so was the beginning of the Gospel and theological claims about Jesus. If Jesus did not physically rise from the dead as apprehended by the senses as the apostles maintain, then there is nothing stopping Christianity getting absorbed into transcendental philosophy, and/or politics and ethics, as has been the case in “liberal” theology and threatens to be the case in contemporary American Evangelical theology.³ Such is the case on a theory of revelation that operates in a way that doubts the reliability and meaningfulness of sense perception, as Henry’s doctrine of transcendental revelation does.

For Henry, an event perceived by the senses has no meaning in itself. Its meaning must be provided by transcendental revelation. Transcendental revelation provides justification and meaning for the event. Henry assumes that meaning cannot come through the physical event itself, and that the event cannot give rise to any subsequent theological claims. Any subsequent theological claims must be provided by transcendental revelation, which takes place within the human knower on the basis of a Christianized anthropology and an idealized Christology. The purpose and focus of such subsequent claims, however, is not redemption but certainty of knowledge with respect to knowing God’s existence, the existence of the world, how it works, and ethics.

³ I already noted above how Henry’s theology of transcendent revelation is supposed to provide the ground for social engagement. In addition, Mohler, *Culture Shift*, chapter 1, argues that the Christian’s relation to the “City of God” requires a Christian’s engagement in the political process of the “City of Man,” such that a Christian can never be counted faithful in the City of God if the Christian neglects his or her duty in the City of Man. That duty in the City of Man is a political one, to engage the culture in the “right way” (2). Mohler hereby, however, utterly subverts the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ by conditioning the believer’s acceptance by God on the right kind of political and social engagement. Mohler attributes much of this perspective to Carl Henry.

Central to the problem is Henry's affirmation of skepticism in his adoption of the RTP. He needs transcendental revelation precisely because he assumes the RTP. If the RTP is not valid, then there is no need to run revelation transcendently, or to verify the "historicity" of the resurrection of Jesus by "scientific" means, meaning by the methods of historical criticism. Using insights from Speech Act Theory, Austin and Searle argue for direct access to the world through the senses. In a word, they argue for realism. What Speech Act Theory teaches about sense perception undercuts a basic assumption of modern idealism. As it does so, it provides support for the taxonomy of the Gospel.

Christian theology needs to be focused on how God and knowledge of God are displayed and apprehended *in* the physical event of the resurrection, that is, *in* God's action in Jesus' actual, physical triumph over death, as well as in other acts of God in physical reality as recorded in the Scriptures and found in the life of the church. The transcendence of God is manifest *in* God's actions in physical reality and not in the way of the transcendental epistemology of modern idealism. In terms of epistemology, God becomes manifest and known through direct access to His actions in physical reality through the senses. A realistic view of sense perception is, therefore, more fitting for Christian theology.

The RTP in Focus

It was shown in chapter four above how Descartes developed the RTP. The RTP is a theory about sense perception that stems from being skeptical about being able to obtain reliable knowledge of the world through the senses. Descartes provided at least four arguments for such skepticism. His first argument stemmed from optical illusions. Secondly, he theorized about dreams, where we have images of things in the world, while we know that the world is not there because we are dreaming. Thirdly, Descartes offered the thought experiment about the wax

wherein he concluded that what the senses see, touch, smell, etc., do not actually tell us what the “essence” of the wax is, meaning, that the senses do not give us genuine knowledge about the wax. Fourthly, he offered the example of the ideas of the sun in relation to asking about the sun’s actual size. One idea comes through the sense of sight. The other idea is provided by astronomical reasoning. In the idea that comes from sight, the sun looks much smaller than we “know” it to be by astronomical reasoning. The knowledge provided by astronomical reasoning is right, meaning, by implication, that the idea of the sun given by sight is wrong. Therefore, the sense of sight does not give real or true knowledge of the world.

The question that arises from these skeptical arguments is just what a person sees when using the senses if they do not give actual knowledge of the world. The answer given, as we saw in chapter four, is that a person does not “see” the world but a representation of the world. This representation is called an “idea” by Descartes. The idea is supposed to resemble the object in the world of which it is the representation. The “idea” exists in the mind, not in the world, and it is the “idea” that the mind sees, perceives, senses. The object in the world is not directly seen or otherwise sensed by the senses. The “ideas” have had many names in the modern philosophical tradition including “sense data.”⁴

Suppose, therefore, that I am looking at my poodle. The RTP claims that what my mind sees is a sense datum of my poodle, not my poodle. Descartes asserted this when he talked about ideas of things hovering before the mind. This tracks with Descartes’ finding certainty in clear and distinct ideas and his correlative theory of mind when he posits that one’s awareness of oneself is a perception of an idea of oneself. In other words, one’s awareness of oneself is *not* “self-referential.” Thus, the RTP stands for the proposition that there is an intermediate

⁴ Auyang, *Mind*, 31.

something between my mind and my poodle and that this intermediate something is what my mind actually sees. This understanding of sense perception has been held by the giants of modern philosophy. Descartes, John Locke (d. 1704), and George Berkeley (d. 1753), for example, called this intermediate something “ideas.” David Hume (d. 1776) called them “impressions.” Kant called them “representations.” A. J. Ayer (d. 1989) called them “sense data.” Whatever one calls this intermediate something, the point is that the RTP posits that what is actually perceived in sense perception is not the external world, but representations of the world in the mind.

As we saw in chapter four, the construct of the sense datum creates the problem of how to know that the idea or sense datum accurately resembles the object in the world that it represents. We called this the problem of the truth-gap. This truth-gap must be bridged, or one has no way of getting beyond skepticism. This gap leads to having to posit a way of knowing other than through the senses that can confirm the accuracy of what comes through them. But that results in a way of knowing that must turn inward, that is, transcendently, away from the senses, into operations within the ego. If it can be shown under analysis that the RTP is not a valid and helpful account of sense perception, then the transcendental account of epistemology is not needed. By “transcendental” here I am referring to a means of knowing that turns away from, is independent of, or irrespective of the senses and, therefore, any physical thing or occurrence in physical reality.⁵

⁵ By arguing against transcendental revelation, I am not suggesting that God, divine things, or even values do not remain transcendent, even as they are known in and through physical things and occurrences that are perceived by the senses. God remains transcendent in the sense that God is absolutely, ontologically distinct from any created thing. The issue here is how we come to *know* God. The mystery of the Incarnation and related actions in physical reality is that God becomes *known* in and through specific physical things and actions relating to Jesus Christ and the Gospel, not apart from them. Values also remain transcendent in the sense that they are not eliminated by a reduction to physical functions, even as they can be *known* through physical things.

Austin's and Searle's Criticisms of the RTP

Both Austin and Searle have provided compelling arguments for refuting the RTP as a valid theory of sense perception. Searle does so in favor of “direct realism,” which will be discussed in the next section. Their arguments consist of showing that the RTP does not solve the problem of skepticism and that it leads to solipsism, which is a disfavored result in philosophy. They also show that the reasoning upon which the RTP is based is faulty for a number of reasons. Searle captures that reasoning under the term the “Bad Argument.”⁶ In that connection he addresses the so-called argument from science.⁷ Austin's critique focuses on the argument from illusions. The goal of the critique of the RTP is captured in Searle's statement: “Once we reject the idea that all we ever perceive are our own perceptions, then we have no epistemic basis for denying external realism.”⁸ This is important. The heart of the RTP is that all we perceive is our own perceptions, either ideas or sense data, or the like. But once it is no longer necessary to accept that all we perceive is our own perceptions, then the mind is open to the world in direct realism.

A Caveat with Respect to Refuting the Skeptic

It is important to note at the outset a caveat that Searle mentions with respect to addressing the RTP. The caveat is that one can never directly refute the skeptic. Searle says,

Skeptical arguments in philosophy in general ... have the same form: no matter how much evidence (grounds, reason, warrant, foundation, etc.) you have for a claim, no matter how perfect your epistemic basis is for making the claim, you could always be mistaken. ... There is always a gulf between the evidence and the conclusion. So you think you have evidence that the sun will rise in the east tomorrow (the problem of induction), or that other people are conscious (the problem of other minds), or you

⁶ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 20-29.

⁷ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 28-29.

⁸ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 31.

can know the existence of objects by perceiving them (the problem of perception), but in every case you could have perfect evidence and still be wrong.⁹

Searle is pointing out that the skeptic uses a burden of proof that cannot be met. Descartes demonstrated this with his “all or nothing” burden of proof. If the burden of proof is perfection, then there really can be no knowledge of anything. It is impossible to prove absolutely that you are not mistaken. Even if that burden of proof is rejected in favor of what can follow from an “airtight” logical operation, there would only be a narrow universe of knowledge, a much narrower universe than what is given by God and what we experience in life. But why should the burden of proof be “all or nothing” or perfection? That in itself is a questionable assumption. But that is the burden of proof the skeptic uses. I have more to say about this in chapter ten and why skepticism should be rejected on theological grounds.

The RTP Leaves Skepticism Intact and Leads to Solipsism

The initial arguments against the RTP are precisely the fact that the RTP is no answer to skepticism and that it leads to solipsism. These are effective arguments against the RTP because, in philosophical accounts of epistemology, skepticism and solipsism are consequences to be avoided.

It could be said that Descartes formulated the RTP as a way of trying to answer his skepticism toward sense perception. The answer lies in the assertion that the *idea* of an object *resembles* the object. Searle thinks that Berkeley conclusively refuted the RTP by showing how it makes no sense of the concept of resemblance. What Searle means is that Berkeley conclusively showed that “the perceptual ideas that we have of an object could never resemble the object itself because the object is completely invisible and otherwise inaccessible to the

⁹ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 219.

senses [on the theory]. There is no way that the ideas we can perceive can resemble ... actual features of objects because the objects, by definition, are inaccessible to our senses.”¹⁰ One cannot know that the idea of an object resembles the object when on the basis of the theory itself, one does not see the object. As a result, the RTP provides no way of avoiding skepticism.

The RTP is also faulty and invalid because it leads to solipsism. At this point, the development of “phenomenalism” must be noted. Phenomenalism arises from Kant’s idealism. It is the doctrine that our minds deal only with sense data, and not with things in themselves. Phenomenalism was a development of modern idealism as an attempt to address the failure of the RTP to resolve the skeptical problem relating to sense perception. Phenomenalism tried to dissolve the problem by removing the distinction between the sense datum and the object, so that the sense datum became the object, as Searle states: “The sense data that you see just are the objects that you see.”¹¹ As a result, phenomenalism posits that since all that we perceive is sense data, then sense data must be all that exists.¹² When sense data are all that exists, the problem of accounting for how the sense data could resemble an object in the world is dissolved, since the object is no longer deemed to exist. But then the existence of the object is surrendered.

For Descartes, even with the RTP, there was a really existing world out there that was represented by ideas. Affirming the existence of that real world does not solve the resemblance problem, but at least Descartes thought that there was a world out there to which the ideas were somehow related. His way of confirming the accuracy of the ideas in the mind involved an appeal to God and internal operations, as we saw in chapter three. Nevertheless, ideas are not the only thing that exists for Descartes, even if he does contend that the senses do not give reliable

¹⁰ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 225–26.

¹¹ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 220.

¹² Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 226.

access to the world and posits the RTP.

Phenomenalism, however, states that all that we can say exists is sense data. Sense data, however, are entirely subjective ontologically speaking. They exist only in the mind. Phenomenalism, therefore, reduces “the public ontologically objective world to a set of private ontologically subjective phenomena.”¹³ Sense data exist only in a person’s mind, on the terms of the theory, and no one person has access to another person’s sense data.¹⁴ Therefore, a person is really just all alone with his or her sense data. There is nothing else, on the terms of the theory. The problem is compounded when it comes to knowing whether other people exist. One cannot know that other people exist because the only thing one could know about them is a sense datum of them. But that sense datum exists only subjectively in one’s own mind. As a result, on the terms of the theory, a person has no way to affirm that other people exist.¹⁵ The theory can lead to no other conclusion than that a person is completely alone. This is solipsism.

Solipsism, however, is an absurd result, because human beings relate to one another and the world knowingly all the time. Phenomenalism, therefore, is refuted because solipsism is a *reductio ad absurdum*¹⁶ of any theory, and phenomenalism implies solipsism.¹⁷ But phenomenalism rests on the RTP or the Bad Argument. Therefore, the RTP is invalid. Searle points out that “[o]nce one treats the content of perception as the object of perception, something like the [RTP and phenomenalism] seems inevitable.”¹⁸ The only thing the RTP contends we

¹³ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 227.

¹⁴ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 229.

¹⁵ Searle, *Intentionality*, 60.

¹⁶ The phrase *reductio ad absurdum* is Latin and can be translated into English as “a reduction to absurdity.”

¹⁷ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 229.

¹⁸ Searle, *Intentionality*, 60.

have access to is “our own private experiences.”¹⁹ The RTP is inimical to any shared human experience, whether it is used or assumed in philosophical theory or a theology of revelation. The RTP is subjective—with respect to epistemology—in its formulation.

Austin’s and Searle’s Arguments against the Reasoning behind the RTP

In addition to showing how the RTP is invalid on the basis that it does not resolve skepticism and that it leads to solipsism, both Austin and Searle directly evaluate the arguments from illusion on which the RTP is based. Austin provides a detailed analysis and refutation of the argument for sense data based on illusions in his book *Sense and Sensibilia*.²⁰ His analysis is not aimed at Descartes. It actually interacts with books by twentieth century philosophers A. J. Ayer²¹ and H. H. Price²², who were not rationalists like Descartes, but materialist empiricists. Ayer and Price were part of the logical positivist school of the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, both Ayer and Price were in line with Descartes and other idealists when they argued that what is perceived in sense perception is sense data. They based their arguments on illusion.²³

¹⁹ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 23.

²⁰ J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, reconstructed from the manuscript notes by G. J. Warnock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

²¹ A. J. Ayer, *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* (New York: Macmillan, 1940).

²² H. H. Price, *Perception* (London: Methuen, 1932).

²³ It may be surprising that twentieth century, materialist philosophers should hold a doctrine originally held by Descartes and carried on by Locke, Hume, Kant, and Berkeley, but Austin notes that Ayer was doing exactly that. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 61, states, “It is a curious and in some ways rather melancholy fact that the relative positions of Price and Ayer at this point turn out to be exactly the same as the relative positions of Locke and Berkeley, or Hume and Kant. In Locke’s view there are ‘ideas’ and also ‘external objects’, in Hume’s ‘impressions’ and also ‘external objects’, in Price’s view ‘sense-data’ and also ‘physical occupants’; in Berkeley’s doctrine there are *only* ideas, in Kant’s *only Vorstellungen* [representations] (things-in-themselves being not strictly relevant here), in Ayer’s doctrine there are *only* sense-data—but Berkeley, Kant, and Ayer all further agree that we can *speak as if* there were bodies, objects, material things” [emphasis original]. The “speak as if” here means that Ayer and Price place in doubt the actual existence of bodies, objects, and material things since they posit that a person only perceives sense data.

The argument from illusion relates to either dreams or what the man on the street would regard as optical illusions. There are many such optical illusions, such as a straight stick that looks bent in water; a coin that looks elliptical, not round, from a certain angle; a tower, as Descartes mused, that looks round from far away but square up close; slightly moving one eyeball to the side so that one has double vision as David Hume ventured; Wittgenstein's figure that looks like a duck in one instance and rabbit in another; mirages, and the like. Austin explains that the purpose of the argument from illusion is to persuade people to accept that what they perceive with the senses is "sense-data," not the external world.

The argument does this by first asserting that sense-data is what is perceived in "abnormal" and "exceptional" cases, that is, in dreams, in cases of illusion, or in moving one's eyeball. The next step, however, is to contend that sense data is what is *always* perceived such that perceiving sense data is the essence of sense perception.²⁴ The key part of the argument involves the "move" from *sometimes* seeing sense data to *always* seeing sense data such that the only thing one *ever* sees is sense data.

Austin's Attack On the RTP

Austin attacks the argument from illusion by attacking the move from *sometimes* seeing sense data to *always* seeing sense data. This move is based on the contention that there is no *qualitative* difference between the "abnormal" case of sense perception and the "normal" case, such that if a person sees sense data in the abnormal case, then a person always sees sense data. The argument asserts that since there is no qualitative difference in consciousness between the two cases, then they must be treated analytically and logically alike. So, if sense data is seen in

²⁴ Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 20.

one case of sense perception, it is seen in every case. Austin explains that the argument goes like this: A sense datum of a straight stick submerged partially below the surface of water cannot be distinguished qualitatively from a sense datum of seeing an actually crooked stick, with the result that there is no qualitative difference between a “delusive” perception and a veridical one.²⁵ The “delusive” perception consists of seeing the stick in the water. The “veridical” perception consists of seeing a stick that is not in water and that is just plain crooked.²⁶

Now, preliminarily, Austin takes issue with Ayer’s play on the words “illusion” and “delusion.” These words are quite different. Ayer, however, passes off the illusion as a delusion, which Austin argues is a not a valid use of language.²⁷ These words are different because an illusion in the sense of an optical illusion is not a problem in the knowing subject. A delusion, however, is a problem in the knowing subject in the sense of a person being delusional.

Nevertheless, Austin’s first point is that the “delusive” and “veridical” or “true” perceptions are in fact qualitatively different. To say that they are not different is plainly false *as a matter of fact*. Austin points out that dreaming that one is being presented to the President of the United States is qualitatively distinguishable from actually being presented to the President.²⁸ A “dream-like quality” is quite different from a waking experience. If it were not, Austin argues, then all waking experiences would have a dream-like quality; but we know they do not.²⁹ As Austin says, “[D]reams are *dreams*.”³⁰ Moreover, Austin asserts that “it is simply not true to say

²⁵ Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 45.

²⁶ If one recognizes that a person knows by seeing it that a crooked stick not in water is just plain crooked, so as to know the difference between the crooked stick and the one that “looks” crooked when dipped in water, then one begins to see that there is something “fishy” going on with the argument from illusion.

²⁷ Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 22–29.

²⁸ Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 48. Austin uses the Pope in his example.

²⁹ Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 49. See also Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 21.

³⁰ Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 27.

... that seeing a stick refracted in water is exactly like seeing a bent stick.”³¹ Thus, it is simply not true as a matter of fact that there is no qualitative difference between the abnormal or “delusive” visual experience and the true (veridical) one. The argument from illusion, therefore, fails. It cannot maintain the contention that if a person sees sense data in the abnormal or delusive visual perception, then a person always sees sense data in every visual perception. It cannot maintain this contention because there is a qualitative difference between the delusive visual experience that gives rise to the sense datum and the veridical one. The key logical move in the argument fails.

Austin also attacks the argument for the RTP by attacking the first premise, which is that what one sees in illusions is sense data. He attacks this premise on the basis that *illusions* are public perceptual experiences, not subjective experiences, meaning that the illusion is in the world, not in the mind. A number of people can stand at the edge of a pool and see the phenomenon of refraction when a stick is dipped beneath the surface of the water. The “illusion” of the bent stick is quite public. That is to say, it is an objective, not subjective, phenomenon. Austin states, “[W]hen I see an optical illusion, however well it comes off, there is nothing wrong with me personally [as in a delusion], the illusion is not a little (or large) peculiarity or idiosyncrasy of my own; it is quite public, anyone can see it, and in many cases standard procedures can be laid down for producing it.”³² Austin states similarly that “a mirror-image ... is not a ‘sense-datum’; it can be photographed, seen by any number of people, and so on.”³³ Seeing an illusion, therefore, does not logically entail having to posit the theory of sense datum. The first premise of the argument from illusion, therefore, fails.

³¹ Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 49.

³² Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 24.

³³ Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 31.

The force of this argument becomes evident when one keeps in mind that sense data, like ideas, are purely private or subjective things. They are not purported to be shared phenomena. If illusions, however, are shared phenomenon, since many people can see the illusion at the same time, then there is no need to posit sense data.

The fact that illusions are public can lead to further analysis of the illusions of the round coin that looks elliptical, or the square tower that looks round from a distance, or a mirage. The public nature of these illusions leads to further analysis that dissolves the illusion. The illusion of the elliptical coin or square tower can be dissolved by recognizing physical position or perspective in relation to the object. The round coin looks round from an angle. The square tower looks round from a distance but square up close. Such perspective is an objective thing. The illusion of a mirage can be dissolved by investigating how a mirage is formed, which is also an objective sort of investigation. Hume's trick of moving an eyeball can be dissolved precisely because moving the eyeball makes the visual experience *objectively abnormal*. Wittgenstein's duck/rabbit is an objective drawing which many human beings can look at and recognize the phenomenon. The point is that illusions can be handled objectively without having to posit the highly problematic subjective entities called ideas or sense data.

Searle's Attack On the RTP

Searle attacks the RTP by analyzing what he calls the "Bad Argument." He contends that the Bad Argument always has the same form, no matter which particular illusion is in view. He argues that the Bad Argument is fallacious because it capitalizes on an ambiguity in the terms "aware of" or "conscious of," thus committing the fallacy of ambiguity. We could extend this analysis to the use of words like "sense" or "perceive" in arguments for the RTP.

Searle summarizes the Bad Argument as follows by noting each successive step in the

argument.

First, it is noted that in both the veridical (non-illusory or true) case and the illusory case, there is a qualitative subjective experience occurring in the visual system.

Second, it is asserted that the qualitative subjective experience in both the veridical and illusory cases is identical. Logical consistency, therefore, requires that they be treated in the same way.

Third, in both the veridical and illusory cases a person is aware of something.

Fourth, it is asserted that in the illusory case, a person cannot be aware of a material object because the subjective visual experience is of an illusion. Still, the thing that the person is aware of should have a name. Call it a sense datum.

Fifth, since it was determined in step two that both cases needed to be treated in the same way for logical consistency, what a person sees in the veridical case is also a sense datum since the sense datum is what a person sees in the illusory case.

Sixth, since we only see sense data in both the veridical and illusory cases, it has to be concluded that we never see material objects or other ontologically objective phenomena.³⁴ Direct realism is, therefore, refuted.

Searle contends that the Bad Argument commits the fallacy of ambiguity at the third step.³⁵ The third step provides that in both the veridical case and the illusory case, a person is aware of something. Searle contends that the third step asserts an ambiguity in the term “aware of” by using the term to refer to two different things, as it is used to refer to both the veridical case and the illusory case.³⁶ The type of ambiguity involved, however, is not like the ambiguity in a word

³⁴ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 23.

³⁵ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 24–27. Austin attacks the argument at the second step.

³⁶ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 24–25.

that can have more than one meaning in different contexts, such as the word “bank,” which could be the place where people put money or the ground immediately adjacent to a river.³⁷ The ambiguity consists of using the same term to refer to two different things in the same argument. If the term “aware of” is used in the argument to refer to two things that are quite different from each other, then it is logically false to say that one is “aware of” both of those things in the same way. It is false to do so as a matter of logical consistency.

It is evident that the Bad Argument uses the term “aware of” to refer to two different things. In one case the term “aware of” is being used in the sense of intentionality, that is, in the sense of being aware *of* an *object* like my poodle. In the other case the term “aware of” is being used in a sense of being aware of the *visual experience* itself.³⁸ Being aware of my poodle and being aware of having a visual experience of my poodle are two different things. It is false, therefore, to contend that they must be treated in the same way. Thus, if one argues that in the illusory case one is aware of a sense datum, it is false to argue that in the veridical case one is aware of a sense datum, since in the veridical case, one is aware of the actual object. The argument for the RTP is false because being aware of a sense datum and being aware of an actual object involves being aware of two categorically different things.

Furthermore, even if the illusory case involves having a subjective visual experience, it is different than the veridical case. In the illusory case one is aware of having some sort of a qualitative subjective experience but there is no “aware of” in the sense of intentionality because there is no material object there. In the veridical case there is the subjective visual experience but there is also the “aware of” in the sense of intentionality because the object is there. Searle

³⁷ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 26.

³⁸ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 24–25.

illustrates this by analyzing the following sentence using logical notation: “Subject S has an awareness A of Object O.”³⁹ In the sense of intentionality (the veridical case), the awareness “A” is of the object “O” because it is an awareness of O. Thus, the awareness “A” is not the same as the object “O” ($A \neq O$). In the illusory case, there is no awareness of O because the object “O” is not there. The only thing a person is aware of is the subjective visual experience “A” itself. A and O, therefore, are identical: “*The thing that one is ‘aware of’ is the awareness itself* ($A = O$).”⁴⁰ Clearly, the results $A \neq O$ and $A = O$ are not the same. The point is that the Bad Argument tries to capitalize on a confusion between being aware of a subjective state and being aware of an external object. But these two things are not the same. To treat them as the same, which the RTP does, is fallacious reasoning. The Bad Argument—or rather the argument for the RTP—is, therefore, false.

The argument from science proceeds by reciting the physical process of sight. It starts with the mechanics of light hitting “photoreceptor cells and continu[ing] right through the cortex,” which results in a visual experience in the brain.⁴¹ This argument then posits that the only thing the subject is aware of is the visual experience in the brain. The problem is that the intentionality of the experience enables a person to see real objects and states of affairs in the world. Thus, even when the physical process of sight is set forth, there is a visual experience in the brain and an object in the world that the visual experience is about. The argument from science also tries to capitalize on an ambiguity in the term “aware of” by trying to argue that the only thing a person is aware of is the visual experience in the brain, even though there is an object in the world that

³⁹ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 25.

⁴⁰ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 25, emphasis original.

⁴¹ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 28.

the process of sight is about.⁴² The argument uses the recognition of the physical process of sight to eliminate the object with respect to what sight is looking at.

In light of Austin's and Searle's arguments against the sense data theory, the arguments for the RTP based on illusion and the Bad Argument are false. Accordingly, the RTP and phenomenalism are false. Searle's dictum, therefore, comes back into view: "Once we reject the idea that all we ever perceive are our own perceptions, then we have no epistemic basis for denying external [or direct] realism."⁴³ Accordingly, the mind-world dichotomy is dissolved and the theoretical basis of a solipsistic ego and subjectivism collapses. A vital component of modern idealism collapses. I turn now to Searle's affirmative account of "direct realism."

Searle's Arguments for Direct Realism

In contrast to the RTP, Searle argues for "direct realism" with respect to sense perception. He argues that "[sense] perception is an intentional and causal transaction between mind and the world."⁴⁴ Accordingly, the term "realism" denotes that sense perception gives reliable access to the world. The term "direct" denotes that we do not perceive something else, that is, an "idea" or sense datum, in perceiving the world.⁴⁵ The causal aspect captures the point that when we perceive something, the thing perceived is being perceived directly; there is no intermediate idea or sense datum.⁴⁶ Searle unpacks this by applying the concepts of intentionality to sense perception.

Searle argues that he is justified in treating sense perception in terms of intentionality

⁴² Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 28.

⁴³ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 31.

⁴⁴ Searle, *Intentionality*, 49.

⁴⁵ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 15.

⁴⁶ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 5, 12.

because “all seeing is seeing *that*: whenever it is true to say that *x* sees *y* it must be true that *x* sees that such and such is the case.”⁴⁷ This is just to say that perceptual experience must be an experience *of* something.⁴⁸ The perceptual experience, therefore, contains conditions of satisfaction. If there is no seeing an object that could satisfy the conditions of satisfaction of the visual experience, then there is no seeing. So, if I am seeing my poodle standing in front of me, then I am actually seeing my poodle, not a sense datum or idea of my poodle hovering before my mind. Only my poodle could satisfy the conditions of satisfaction involved in a visual experience of my poodle.⁴⁹ Moreover, my poodle brings about my perception of it in that my poodle itself provides the propositional or presentational content of my seeing it in fulfillment of the conditions of satisfaction of the intentional visual experience. On the other hand, Descartes’ way of constructing visual experience requires that I must see myself seeing my poodle, and that the only thing I actually see is myself seeing, that is, my visual experience. He posits that what I see is the visual experience itself, not what the visual experience is *of*. A gap is thereby created between the mind and the world. This is the precise point of contention between modern idealism and a realistic theory of sense perception. This is the precise lynch-pin in the debate and everything that follows from it.

The concept of intentionality, however, brings to light just how problematic Descartes’ way is since my visual experience must be about some thing in the world for only that thing could fulfill the conditions of satisfaction that the visual experience brings with it. It is, therefore, highly problematic to contend that what one sees in visual experience is the visual experience itself and not what the visual experience is *of*. The account of sense perception in modern

⁴⁷ Searle, *Intentionality*, 40, emphasis original.

⁴⁸ Searle, *Intentionality*, 43.

⁴⁹ Searle, *Intentionality*, 37–38.

idealism must fail, therefore, along with all of the implications that are built upon that account. Searle contends that I do not see my visual experience of my poodle when I am seeing my poodle. I simply see my poodle.⁵⁰ This is direct realism. The concept of intentionality as applied to sense perception provides the account for the direct access to my poodle that direct realism affirms.

That my visual experience of my poodle involves seeing my poodle is evident in two respects. The first is that if I were to close my eyes, the visual experience of seeing my poodle stops. If I open my eyes, my visual experience of seeing my poodle happens again. The second respect is that if I only see a sense datum when I am seeing my poodle and the sense datum is supposed to resemble my poodle, then the sense datum in my mind must be shaped and colored like my poodle; there must be some sort of ontological similarity between the sense datum and my poodle. I would have to conclude, therefore, that there would be two poodles in my visual experience; one being my poodle, the other being the sense datum in my mind.⁵¹ But such a conclusion would be absurd.⁵² It is absurd because there is only one poodle that exists. The conclusion to reach, therefore, is that the RTP is fundamentally flawed. Recognizing as much removes the theoretical basis for asserting that we do not directly perceive the world through the senses.

In fact, Searle contends that direct realism is like a “default position” when it comes to understanding sense perception, using a computer analogy. Searle defines a default position as a view that “we hold prereflectively so that any departure from [it] requires a conscious effort and

⁵⁰ Searle, *Intentionality*, 37–38; Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 5.

⁵¹ On the terms of phenomenalism, there would be only one poodle there, not the real poodle but only the sense datum. On the terms of phenomenalism, I would have no basis to assert that the real poodle exists at all.

⁵² Searle, *Intentionality*, 40.

a convincing argument.”⁵³ One of the default positions is that “[w]e have direct perceptual access to [the real] world through our senses, especially touch and vision.”⁵⁴ This is direct realism. It takes complicated reasoning to overcome a default position. The RTP actually involves complicated, strained, and fallacious argument. It should not be regarded as having succeeded, yet it holds a powerful influence in philosophy and theology to this day with adverse consequences for the taxonomy of the Gospel.

A point of clarification is in order. Searle speaks of seeing something as a “visual experience.”⁵⁵ He is using such language because he contends that in the visual experience “there are two distinct elements: the *ontologically objective* states of affairs in the world that you directly perceive, and the *ontologically subjective* experiences of them.”⁵⁶ He uses the language of visual experience because sense perception is a thing that takes place in consciousness and a person is conscious of this. He uses such language because he is willing to affirm that a dream, for example, is a real visual experience of some kind in consciousness, though it lacks fulfillment of conditions of satisfaction because there is no real object there. Still, Searle (and Austin before him) thinks that it is fallacious to contend that dreams support the postulation of sense data, as Descartes asserted and other philosophers since him. What permits Searle to think so is the analysis of intentionality and the concept of conditions of satisfaction involved with it. The intentionality of sense perception enables him to account for the difference between a visual

⁵³ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 9.

⁵⁴ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 10. It is curious that Searle says especially touch and vision. Why is the smell of chocolate chip cookies baking in the oven not perceptual access to the real world? If others smell it too, then smell is not any more subjective than sight or touch.

⁵⁵ Searle, *Intentionality*, 37–38.

⁵⁶ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 12, emphasis original. The phrase “ontologically subjective” is intended to state the difference between something being *ontologically* subjective in the sense of where it exists, and something being *epistemologically* subjective in the sense of being a matter of personal opinion.

experience while dreaming and a visual experience of an object in the world that provides explanatory power, such that the sense data theory need not be asserted. Accordingly, his account of intentionality enables him to explain the difference while also being able to affirm that a dream is a visual experience in consciousness, even as it is qualitatively different than visual experiences while awake of objects in the world.

Yet, Searle mentions that some philosophers have taken his use of the term “visual experience” to assert that he himself re-introduces a mental entity into sense perception akin to a sense datum as happens in the RTP, against which he is arguing. Searle contends, however, that he does not intend to re-introduce an intermediate entity between the mind and the world with the term “visual experience.” He uses the term “visual experience” for two reasons. First, he must be able to affirm that dreams are a real visual experience of some kind in consciousness, even if there is not a real object of that experience in the world. He must be able to affirm this, or he would be denying an experience that most of us would say is real in consciousness and that we have had. If he denied that, his account of intentionality would lack explanatory power. Second, Searle must also be able to talk in some sense of a perceptual experience in consciousness precisely because sense perception consists of a real mental event in consciousness of which one is conscious.⁵⁷ It seems evident, for example, that I am conscious of having a visual experience of seeing my poodle when I am seeing my poodle. The point of analysis is precisely—and this cannot be emphasized enough—whether seeing means seeing the visual experience of my poodle or seeing my poodle directly. If one holds that my seeing my poodle really means seeing my visual experience of my poodle, then one is heading back down

⁵⁷ Searle, *Intentionality*, 45, states that “visual and other sorts of perceptual experiences are *conscious mental events*” [emphasis original].

the road of the RTP, at best, and phenomenalism, at worst. But then the question becomes how to account for both the visual experience in consciousness and the direct perception of my poodle without going down the road of the RTP.

To do so, Searle needs to account for both consciousness, that is, that one is conscious of having a visual experience in consciousness, because this is real, while also affirming that sense perception means that one does not see the visual experience in the mind but rather the object in the world, if one is awake and not dreaming. Affirming that one sees the object in the world and not the visual experience follows from the refutation of the RTP. The concept of intentionality, with its conditions of satisfaction, accounts for the contention of direct realism; that one perceives the object directly in sense perception. The concept of intentionality also enables Searle to account for being conscious of the visual experience without positing sense data by asserting that the intentionality of sense perception is “self-referential.” As Searle says, the visual experience is self-referential in that “it ... performs no speech act of reference to itself! Rather, the sense in which the visual experience is self-referential is simply that it figures in its own conditions of satisfaction.”⁵⁸ In other words, the intentionality of sense perception brings its own conditions of satisfaction with it. Such conditions are not imposed on sense perception from some other place in addition to the sense perception itself. The mind does not perceive its visual experience as an object. Consciousness does not mean that the mind perceives itself as an object.

Searle is trying to explain something that seems simple and self-evident in experience but is difficult to put into words and conceptuality. It seems to me that a simpler point is that consciousness is not divided. Consciousness should not be viewed in terms of subject-object dualism. Consciousness does not mean that it presents itself as an object to itself. If it did,

⁵⁸ Searle, *Intentionality*, 49, emphasis original.

consciousness would be divided, and the homunculus fallacy would be generated. Thus, the intentionality of sense perception should not be viewed like viewing consciousness as an object to itself. This is what the phrase “self-referential” is intended to capture.

The word “homunculus” comes from Latin and means roughly “little man.” The homunculus fallacy involves positing that a little man in the mind observes the relation between the mind and the idea of the mind that the mind “perceives” when consciousness is understood in the sense of subject-object dualism. In Descartes’ view, the mind perceives itself as an object, meaning, that it has an “idea” of itself in the sense of resemblance. Such a construct immediately creates the problem of how to verify that the idea that the mind has of itself accurately resembles itself. This is parallel to the problem of the RTP in terms of confirming that the idea in the mind of an object accurately resembles the object. In fact, the RTP is parallel to or reflects Descartes’ theory of mind. His theory of mind creates the problem that the mind and the idea of the mind must be compared in order to verify the resemblance between the mind and the idea of it. In order for verification to take place, the mind must be able to compare itself to the idea of itself, but it would not be able to do so because it is one. Thus, another mind, a homunculus, would have to be posited that could take an “objective” standpoint in order to compare the mind to the idea of itself. Having to posit a homunculus is fallacious, however, because the homunculus would then also be having an idea of the mind that is involved in the comparison. To verify that that new idea of the mind in the homunculus is accurate, another homunculus would be needed to make that comparison. But that homunculus would also be having a new idea of the mind which would need to be verified by yet another homunculus. This need for verification creates an infinite regress of homunculuses within the mind when it is posited that what one sees in visual experience is the visual experience itself; that is, that the visual experience in consciousness

becomes the object of the experience. But an infinite regress is a result to be avoided. Asserting that what one sees in sense perception is the visual experience is also fallacious because it posits another entity in the mind distinct from the mind—the homunculus—that engages in knowing the mind. This presents a problem of identity. The solution resides in not making the mind an idea to itself in the awareness of consciousness, but rather to maintain the unity of consciousness and then to assert that it is “self-referential,” in an attempt to capture the reality of consciousness with a phrase and a concept that does not bring into play treating consciousness in the way of subject-object dualism. Calling intentionality “self-referential” is intended to state this solution.

Direct Realism, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the Taxonomy of the Gospel

Consciousness is actually profound and mysterious. It involves awareness and knowledge of self, and this awareness is self-reflective without breaking the unity of consciousness. It is more akin to an intransitive verb. Philosophers get trapped by consciousness’ awareness of itself into thinking that the awareness of itself must be understood in the sense of a subject viewing an object. But this is false because, in consciousness, the subject and the object are one.

This is an important consideration because in modern idealism, the same structure of “idea” is posited with respect to consciousness and with respect to sense perception, even with respect to God, creating the problem of verification of the resemblance between the idea and that which is the subject matter of the idea. Verification would have to take place from an “objective” standpoint. But that objective standpoint is impossible with respect to the mind’s idea of itself and the mind’s idea of God, and allusive with respect to the idea and the object in the world in sense perception. This problem is inherent in modern idealism from top to bottom.

There has been an additional objection to Searle’s account of sense perception that Searle addresses. The objection is that his account still requires verification from a neutral standpoint to

confirm that the visual experience is caused by the state of affairs in the world. The objection contends that Searle's account of sense perception involves an *inference* from the visual experience to the contention that the object of the experience exists, such that the visual experience is *evidence* of the existence of the object. With respect to my poodle, the objection contends that my visual experience of my poodle is evidence that my poodle exists.

What matters with my poodle matters also to God's action in the world, including God raising Jesus from the dead. With respect to the resurrection of Jesus, the objection would be that the apostles' visual experience of Jesus alive again was evidence to support an inference or argument that Jesus was alive again. This objection has the implication that the evidence is problematic because there is no way to provide the required verification from a neutral standpoint. The breaking apart of consciousness in the positing of sense data is creeping in again in this objection. Skepticism is lurking here once again and requires that verification of seeing Jesus alive again must be provided by a frame of reference external to seeing Jesus alive again, or the seeing will be deemed to be false, or, at least, some other explanation will have to be offered to assert that it was true.

Searle's point about the self-referentiality of intentionality, however, breaks down the objection. It enables Searle to be able to affirm that sense perception does involve an experience in consciousness while also being about the object in the world such that a person directly perceives the object in sense perception. There is no need, therefore, to posit that what the mind sees in the visual experience is evidence for something *else*, namely the existence of the material

object.⁵⁹ It just sees the object. I know my poodle exists because I see my poodle directly.⁶⁰ The apostles asserted that Jesus was alive again because they directly saw Him alive again. No other evidence than seeing Jesus alive again was needed to “prove” that He was alive again. When it comes to seeing my poodle and having knowledge about my poodle, or seeing Jesus alive again and having that knowledge, “[s]eeing is the way of knowing.”⁶¹ No verification by some other frame of reference is needed, not if consciousness and intentionality are “self-referential.”

Austin provides a similar argument to deny that seeing something is evidence for *an inference* that the thing exists. He uses the example of the existence of a pig. Austin says that there may be evidence that a pig has been in the area. There may be marks in the ground made by the pig’s hooves. There may be buckets of feed for pigs lying around. One could hear the snorting noise pigs make and smell the characteristic smell of pig manure. Then Austin says, “But if the animal then emerges and stands there plainly in view, there is no longer any question of collecting evidence; its coming into view doesn’t provide me with more *evidence* that it’s a pig; I can now just *see* that it is; the question is settled.”⁶²

So, the question of whether Jesus rose from the dead does not require any “evidence” beyond seeing Jesus raised from the dead. It should be settled because the apostles saw Him alive again. To be sure, they could have been mistaken, but this possibility does not in itself invalidate the claim of Jesus’ resurrection. The problem of needing evidence for the resurrection

⁵⁹ Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 11, states, “These entities [i.e., ideas, sense data], which of course don’t really figure at all in the plain man’s language or among his beliefs, are brought in with the implication that whenever we ‘perceive’ there is an *intermediate* entity *always* present and *informing* us about something *else*” [emphasis original]. The something else is the object being perceived. Thus, the sense data is supposed to provide evidence about the object to which it relates.

⁶⁰ Searle, *Intentionality*, 71–72, Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 219–20.

⁶¹ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 220.

⁶² Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 115, emphasis original.

arises from the need to satisfy a faulty theory of sense perception like the RTP in which it is theorized that the object of perception is not directly seen, but where the idea or sense datum of the object is just taken as evidence from which an inference could be made that the object exists. The modern idealist result would be that when the disciples and the women saw Jesus alive, they did not see Him but sense data, and that sense data was supposed to be evidence that He was alive again. But now the gap created by the RTP comes into play between the minds of the disciples and the physical occurrence of Jesus being alive again which requires bridging by verification so we can be sure that He really was alive again. Some other framework can step into this gap and nullify or explain away the resurrection or affirm it on the basis of reason. But then, in either case, the problems of foundationalism and public theology are operating. Direct realism eliminates the gap and, thereby, eliminates the need for verification from some standpoint and framework external to the event. Direct realism, therefore, contravenes foundationalism and public theology.

There are additional considerations. Because the intentionality of the mind pertains to sense perception, the apparatus of intentionality can be used to account for sense perception in terms of conditions of satisfaction, propositional content, and direction of fit. The propositional content of visual experience is the state of affairs being perceived.⁶³ The direction of fit in sense perception is *always* mind-to-world such that the propositional content in the perceptual experience must fit the world. This makes sense because the perceptual experience is of the object or state of affairs in the world. Since the propositional content of the perceptual experience must fit the world, if the visual experience is about the world, the concept of the direction of causation comes into view. The direction of causation in sense perception is world-to-mind meaning that the state of

⁶³ Searle, *Intentionality*, 40.

affairs perceived brings about the propositional content of the perceptual experience. It has to be this way if the perceptual experience is a direct, intentional interaction with a state of affairs in the world. Thus, Jesus being alive again is the propositional content of the disciples and the women seeing, touching, and hearing Jesus alive again, and his being alive again caused their visual experience of seeing Him alive again.

This leads to another consideration, namely, that perceptual experience is involuntary. This means that a person cannot “detach the visual experience and operate on it at will,” as a person can with thoughts, words, or pictures.⁶⁴ Searle states that “I cannot shuffle these [perceptual] experiences around at will, the way I can shuffle representations around at will.”⁶⁵ We may be able to “turn off” our senses, so to speak, by plugging our nose or closing our eyes. If our nose is not plugged and our eyes are not shut, however, we do not control having the perceptual experience and getting the propositional content that we are receiving.⁶⁶ The involuntariness of sense perception is important for the taxonomy of the Gospel because if the women and the apostles were awake and conscious with their eyes open when the risen Jesus appeared to them—which they were, then “direct realism” supports affirming that they really did see Jesus alive again.

Austin’s and Searle’s refutation of the RTP and Searle’s defense of direct realism are, therefore, important for Christian theology. They are important because they affirm the realistic view of sense perception exhibited in the taxonomy of the Gospel and, thereby, support the outside-in way of knowing exhibited there. Moreover, when the RTP is refuted and direct realism is affirmed, there is no need to resort to transcendental revelation and verifying the

⁶⁴ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 63.

⁶⁵ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 63.

⁶⁶ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 63.

apostles' and the women's apprehension of the resurrection through the senses by historical criticism. Accordingly, the subjectivism that modern idealism introduces into Christian theology is discredited, and the detrimental impacts in theology of the mind-body problem and the fact-value split can be overcome.

CHAPTER TEN

APPLICATIONS OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN AID OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

The purpose of this project has been to examine the impact that modern philosophy has had on Christian theology since the seventeenth century. This purpose is undertaken in the interests of methodological concerns. That modern philosophy has had a profound impact on Christian theology is axiomatic. My interest has been to understand how that impact works given the particular features of modern philosophy.

Many impacts of modern philosophy on theology could be identified. I have specifically identified the problems of public theology, subjectivism, secularism, and the fact-value split. Public theology is a way that foundationalism comes to the surface in theology by requiring that theological claims be subject to evidence and warrants that would be acceptable to an intelligent, rational, responsible person. Subjectivism involves the source of knowledge and implicates the issue of authority. I have spoken of the source of knowledge in modern idealism in the directional metaphor of “inside-out.” This metaphor is intended to mean that the ego is the ground and source of knowledge so that knowledge comes from within, and the ego defines and structures all external reality by means of ideas, structures, and operations that are inherent in or take place within it. In this framework, it is assumed that external facts and operations have no meaning and are chaotic unless meaning and order are provided by the structures and ideas originating in the ego. Skepticism is also assumed with respect to the reliability of sense perception.

In the framework of modern idealism, the inside-out way is a transcendental way of knowing because it posits that knowledge is acquired in ways that move away from and eschew knowledge that could come from an outside-in manner in connection with anything physical and

the senses. Indeed, it was the purpose of Descartes' doubting, not only to free the mind from all prejudices, but also to prepare the mind for withdrawal from the senses.¹ These transcendental operations can be conceived of in a secular way, that is, without reference to God and with reference to inherent structures in the mind, or they could be conceived of as having God as the immediate source. In either case, the way of knowing is transcendental, and both ways share skepticism toward external sources of knowledge. Kant's version of the transcendental subject is a secular version of this. I have argued that Henry's doctrine of transcendental revelation is a theistic version of this. I have argued that Henry shares skepticism toward external sources of knowledge with Descartes, Kant, and the modern philosophical tradition. In the Cartesian-Kantian framework, only the transcendental way can provide objective knowledge, even if the source of knowledge is subjective.

I have contrasted this transcendental way of knowing with an outside-in way. In the outside-in way, it is asserted that sources external to the ego play a formative role in shaping the ego with respect to knowledge, beliefs, moral judgments, and assumptions, where those sources include tradition, culture, the physical world, the body, and God's operations in physical reality. I have argued that the taxonomy of the Gospel exhibits an outside-in way of knowing.

The issue of authority involves whether the ego is a law unto itself that subjects the external world to its judgments and determinations, or whether the ego is humbled by being formed and informed by external factors. I have argued that the inside-out way of knowing leads to the autonomous ego in terms of authority. This is subjectivism. Alasdair MacIntyre provides a helpful account of this in connection with ethics in his discussion of emotivism.² He argues that

¹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 6.

² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 6–13.

emotivism is a characteristic of American culture. That being the case, American theologians, Christians, and Christian churches are not immune to subjectivism. I have argued that this subjectivism stems from the framework of modern idealism and from the fact that Descartes premised the inside-out way of knowing on a thoroughgoing skepticism which called into doubt all external sources of knowledge, including God's promises and commandments, the human body, and traditional culture, and established such doubt (skepticism) as an assumption of modern epistemology. It is also my contention that if theology desires to proceed free of the foundationalism of modern philosophy, it should embrace the outside-in way of knowing, which is to say that it should recognize how modern idealism works and move away from it as a framework of knowledge, whether conceived in a secular or theistic fashion. Such a recognition would mean understanding God's word in an operative epistemology not merely in the sense that it provides information but in the sense that God acts in and through it to call the ego into question and change it with respect to repentance and faith in Christ from without. This means embracing a view of Scripture, and preaching, teaching, and sacramental action based on it, that is not merely propositional but in the nature of speech acts that are attempting to do something to the knowing subject.

I have framed secularism as resulting from Descartes' treatment of the mind-body problem. The mind-body problem, in turn, was the result of Descartes' *cogito*, where, having doubted away all external sources of knowledge in his thoroughgoing skepticism, he concluded that the only thing he could be sure he knew was that he himself exists. He argued that this conclusion is the one thing that can withstand skepticism. So, the ego became the bedrock of knowledge and its source. In establishing the ego as the bedrock of knowledge, having doubted away everything external, including everything physical, even his own body, he concluded that what he is as a

human being in essence is a thinking substance. Accordingly, he set the mind and the body in opposition to each other and concluded by a deterministic logic that mind and body can have no causal interaction with each other. This is the mind-body problem. When all reality is viewed through the lens of this problem—which is how idealism works as its characterization of the human being becomes the paradigm of all reality and knowledge—secularism is the result. This result follows because if mind cannot causally interact with body, then God cannot causally interact with the created order, except to be, at most, the First Cause that got the whole thing started, while the world runs on its own according to natural laws. The fact-value split also follows with the result that everything pertaining to the body is governed by scientific reasoning through mathematics. Reductionistic scientific reasoning becomes the sole judge of what could happen in the external world, what could exist there, and how the world works. Every claim that implicates the physical realm must be subject to its judgments and determinations. Whatever does not comport with its judgments and determinations is discounted as genuine knowledge and sloughed off into some other category that is not regarded as real or true. One of those categories is personal, subjective opinion. In biblical hermeneutics, one of those categories is myth or symbol. If God cannot be regarded as acting in physical reality for any purpose, then the result is secularism, even if the account one is dealing with is purportedly theological.

Reductionistic scientific reasoning and methodology, as governing the world of facts, generally finds its expression in Christian theology in historical criticism with respect to interpretation of the Bible. If, however, a person has experienced how interpretation of the Bible can become mere subjective opinion in Bible classes at church, then one has also experienced emotivism at work in biblical interpretation. Biblical interpretation is then subject to both prongs of the fact-value split at once: the fact prong controlled by scientific reasoning and the

methodology of historical criticism, with the value prong becoming subjective and emotive. This two-pronged problem presents a chaotic and confusing picture when it comes to methods of biblical interpretation. But this two-pronged problem can be seen as a dual impact of modern idealism.

I have also argued that Speech Act Theory as originally articulated by J. L. Austin and developed by John R. Searle can be helpful to Christian theology in two ways. The first way is to offer a critique of the tenets and outcomes of modern idealism. I have applied this critique in order to discredit modern idealism as an appropriate foundation for Christian theology. The second way is to help theology by providing some concepts, analysis, and conceptuality that can support the taxonomy of the Gospel and aid theology in moving past or beyond some difficult impasses and splits created by the foundationalism of modern philosophy. It has not been my intention to use Speech Act Theory to replace modern idealism with another philosophical foundation that would set the terms upon which theology must be done. Rather, my intention has been to use Speech Act Theory in aid of Christian theology in the direction of Christian self-description. I maintain that Speech Act Theory can do this because many of its tenets have affinity with features present in the taxonomy of the Gospel, while modern idealism, on the other hand, is inimical to those features.

I have already shown in some ways how Speech Act Theory, being a philosophy of language, can provide such aid to Christian theology, but I will do more in this chapter. I have done this, for example, in critique of the reductive view of science and the skeptical view of sense perception inherent in modern idealism. What I will do in this chapter is use Searle's analysis of conditions of satisfaction relating to the intentionality of sense perception and to the structure of the speech act in an analysis of problems in contemporary evangelical theology

relating to historicity, revelation, and the nature of theological language.

I have set about using Speech Act Theory in a manner consistent with the way the relationship between philosophy and theology was articulated in theology prior to Descartes, namely, that philosophy should be the handmaiden of theology. Descartes reversed this relationship making philosophy foundational for theology, with the result that philosophy in modernity began to dictate terms to theology so that theology had to justify itself to philosophy and proceed pursuant to philosophical agendas in order to be acceptable in academia and the public square. If theology could not provide such a justification, then it had to revise its claims on terms acceptable to philosophy and “evidence and warrants acceptable to any intelligent, rational, responsible person.”³ I have used Speech Act Theory here as philosophical help for theology in trying to get out from under the domination of modern philosophy brought about by Descartes’ reversal of the relationship between philosophy and theology. I have tried to do this by discrediting some of modern philosophy’s claims and showing how important aspects of human life and society cannot be accounted for when the natural sciences are used in a totalizing and reductive manner.

But how then can Speech Act Theory aid Christian theology in getting out from under the foundationalism of modern philosophy and the hegemony of reductive science? I have argued for three ways. One way relates to sense perception and addressing the skepticism of modern philosophy by attacking the RTP and arguing for “direct realism.” Another way has been attacking the mind-body problem by dissolving the causal gap Descartes created between mind and body by using the speech act, where the mind in its intentionality is shown to be in a causal relation with physical reality through the illocutionary force and illocutionary effect of the

³ Placher, “Revisionist and Postliberal Theologies,” 395.

speech act. A third way has been showing that scientific analysis cannot account for many phenomena of human existence that cannot reasonably be denied, such as, speech itself, human consciousness, and human institutions, like money, governments, baseball, and institutions of the Christian faith exhibited and practiced in the life of the church. This analysis was aimed at discrediting a reductive use of science where any phenomena or claim that could not be understood on its terms must be disregarded and eliminated from consideration. The purpose of that analysis was to make room for phenomena and operations in the physical realm, in human society, and in the church that scientific reasoning and methodology cannot account for and recognize. This opens the way for recognizing how God has acted and does act in specific ways in Jesus Christ in physical reality for our salvation and the disclosure of His intentions toward us. Such room is vital in Christian theology for the centrality of God's grace and God as savior and justifier through word and sacrament as displayed in the taxonomy of the Gospel.

I have pursued this examination into how modern philosophy has impacted Christian theology in the interests of "Christian self-description," using the phrase coined by Hans Frei. This phrase conveys the interest of articulating a way to extricate Christian theology from the foundationalism of modern philosophy so that Christianity and Christian theology speaks on its own terms according to its own sources. The postliberal analysis provided by Hans Frei and George Lindbeck provides a distinctive way of analyzing the contours of modern theology by looking at how philosophy has and can be operating foundationally for theology, not only for liberal theology, but also for conservative theology; though in the case of conservative theology modern philosophy operating foundationally functions unwittingly as a sort of "blind spot." Looking out for the issue of foundationalism, I have argued that an analysis of Carl Henry's doctrine of transcendental revelation exhibits a foundationalist influence of modern philosophy,

even though Henry otherwise holds to the convictions of conservative theology and even though those convictions are inconsistent with his methodology. Indeed, I have argued that Henry's doctrine of transcendental revelation, as a theological epistemology, exhibits the assumptions and framework of modern idealism in a Cartesian-Kantian trajectory. The details of this contention were set forth in chapter seven.

Doing all of this has required detailed analysis. Accordingly, I have presented the features of Descartes' thought in some detail. In addition, I have offered a detailed summary of Henry's doctrine of transcendental revelation, while specific features of Speech Act Theory and its ability to critique the tenets of modern idealism have also been discussed in some detail. I have needed to undertake such work to show how conservative theology can be heavily influenced by the foundationalism of modern philosophy and to propose how Speech Act Theory can help theology get out from under that influence. It remains now to provide a sample of ways in which Speech Act Theory can be of constructive help to theology in relation to problems in theology brought about by the foundationalism of modern philosophy. There are many ways the tenets of Speech Act Theory could be used in aid of theology. I will focus in conclusion on the problem of historicity, on the meaning of revelation, and on the characterization of theological language. First, however, I will offer a perspective on the problem of skepticism from a theological point of view.

Calling Skepticism into Question

The central concern of modern philosophy has been epistemology, that is, the examination of how we know what we think we know and how to justify claims to knowledge. How modern philosophy has addressed this concern brings many issues into focus for Christian theology. Four such issues have been the fact-value split, historicity, what revelation means, and the nature of

theological language. These issues have historically divided modern theologians into conservative and liberal, as Frei says, “not so much into denominations as into schools of thought,”⁴ though it has implicated denominations as well. The fact-value split arises due to the bifurcations, splits, and reductions of modern idealism. Language comes into view because it is the medium in which knowledge and faith are expressed. The nature and use of language is critically important in the Christian faith. The resurrection of Jesus is an effective way to bring these issues into focus because it is at the heart of the Christian Gospel and its taxonomy. It can also be paradigmatic for other “miraculous” acts of God in physical reality. But how did the issues of historicity, the meaning of revelation, and the nature of theological language become such central and defining ones for modern theology? The answer is because modern idealism makes epistemology the central and defining issue. But why does modern idealism make epistemology the central and defining issue? The answer is skepticism. Thus, an essential starting point for theologians in moving beyond the foundationalism of modern idealism is to come to terms with skepticism on theological grounds. I turn now to offering some thoughts on this point.

Modernity Starts with Skepticism as a Basic Assumption

Skepticism is where the modern project got started. It has made epistemology the central concern of modern philosophy. It is the driving force in Christian theology behind the concerns of historicity and what revelation is and means. As such, it drives what theological language must look like. It is a central assumption of the modern outlook that can powerfully and unwittingly set the agenda for theology, not only for liberal theology, but also for conservative

⁴ Hans Frei, “Response to ‘Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,’” *Trinity Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1987), 21.

theology. But is skepticism valid?

Descartes made skepticism a central assumption of modern philosophy in his quest to find a ground and source of indubitably certain knowledge. He was searching for that something that he could be sure he knew that could not be assailed by doubt. The way to try to find that something was to doubt everything until he had found that something that could not be doubted. Chapter three explained how Descartes did this and how his doing so led to the *cogito* as the indubitably certain ground of knowledge, in his view.

I explained there that Descartes used a particular burden of proof in his skeptical reasoning. The burden of proof was that if a claim to knowledge was susceptible of the least doubt, then it should be treated as utterly false, with the result that one had to find another way of knowing the particular thing involved or justify it on the basis of another source of knowledge. Thus, if perceiving an object in the external world through the senses could be susceptible to the least doubt, it must be treated as utterly false, with the result that a way of justifying the existence of that thing would need to be established apart from actually seeing or otherwise sensing that thing.

This is key to the whole problem. Whatever is subject to the least doubt requires justification from some other source in order to be regarded as legitimate knowledge. If the knowledge claim involves something taking place in physical reality in the external world that is apprehended by and through the senses, then the justification could not be actually seeing or otherwise sensing that thing, since sense perception is already called into doubt. The justification must be provided from some source and operation taking place internally in the ego and coming from some place independent of the thing seen. In other words, no occurrence in the physical world could have meaning apart from theory and conceptuality developed

independently of that occurrence, and it is the theory and conceptuality independently developed that provides meaning to that occurrence. This *structure* of knowledge is found in operation in both liberal and conservative theology; though, of course, different conclusions are drawn, which is what has historically divided theology into liberal and conservative camps.

What happens if we take the resurrection as an example of an occurrence taking place in physical reality? The liberal subjects it to justification pursuant to the reasoning and methodology of the natural sciences as expressed in biblical interpretation in historical criticism and concludes that Jesus' resurrection did not actual happen. The conservative, on other hand, wants the conclusion to be that it actually happened. But the claim must still be justified from some independent source or prior claim in order to meet the requirement for knowledge imposed by modern idealism with skepticism as a basic assumption. What is that source or prior claim? It could be a doctrine of revelation operating transcendently as it relates to the inspiration of Scripture, or even just operating transcendently in the human mind independently of Scripture. It could be amassing all kinds of empirical evidence. Empirically observing the "empty tomb," for example, justifies the claim that Jesus really did rise from the dead. Some conservative evangelicals think that historical criticism of Scripture must be employed.⁵ Will the use of historical criticism by the conservative evangelical turn out to be a liberal or conservative justification? Will it turn out to be a justification, at all?⁶ But still, the problem is the assumption that the resurrection, as an occurrence in physical reality, must be justified by an independent source and methodology. It is evident, therefore, that skepticism drives divisions in Christian

⁵ See Hagner, "Introduction," 16–17, for example, where he writes that "[w]hat remains vitally important, however, is that these methods be seen as supplementary to, and not as displacing, the historical-critical method. *The latter must continue to hold its fundamental place in the interpretation of the biblical documents. It is nothing less than indispensable*" [emphasis added].

⁶ This question is asked because historical criticism already has within it the skeptical assumption and the methodology of the natural sciences based on the framework of modern idealism.

theology today.

Descartes' use of skepticism set a standard for what could count as knowledge. It set the standard of certainty. There can be diverse ways of articulating how one thinks one can be certain. The point is that Descartes established certainty as the standard, as the burden of proof. It must be indubitably certain that Jesus really did physically rise from the dead or such a claim cannot be counted as genuine knowledge. The liberal and the conservative, who think that the resurrection needs external verification of some kind, have different takes on this and their diverse ways of arguing whether it did or did not happen. The point is that skepticism and Descartes' quest for certainty drive the question for both. Since the taxonomy of the Gospel presents Jesus' resurrection as something that actually happened in physical reality as perceived by the senses, then Christian theology needs to move beyond skepticism.

Moving Beyond Skepticism: A Theological Argument

One way to move beyond skepticism is to understand how it works and call its justification into question. Is indubitable certainty really an appropriate standard for knowledge? This question can be asked on philosophical grounds. It can also be asked on theological grounds. On philosophical grounds, Searle explains, as we have seen, that

[s]keptical arguments in philosophy in general ... have the same form: no matter how much evidence (grounds, reason, warrant, foundation, etc.) you have for a claim, no matter how perfect your epistemic basis is for making the claim, you could always be mistaken. ... There is always a gulf between the evidence and the conclusion. So you think you have evidence that the sun will rise in the east tomorrow (the problem of induction), or that other people are conscious (the problem of other minds), or you can know the existence of objects by perceiving them (the problem of perception), but in every case you could have perfect evidence and still be wrong.⁷

Searle explains in another place that the

⁷ Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 219.

[m]ore radical skeptics go the next step: not only do you *not* have *enough* evidence, but strictly speaking, you have *no evidence at all*, because the evidence you have is in one domain and the claims you are making are about another domain. You have evidence about behavior, but you are making claims about consciousness. You have evidence about the past, but your claims are about the future. You have evidence about your sensations, but your claims are about material objects.⁸

In theology we could say that we have evidence about an action of God in physical reality, but our claim is about salvation and theology. This radical skepticism was the skepticism of David Hume,⁹ which Kant tried to answer in his epistemology of the “transcendental subject,” Kant’s version of the ego.

The upshot of radical skepticism is that if the burden of proof is perfection, then there may not really be knowledge of much of anything. There are milder forms of skepticism, however, since who can live with radical skepticism, even if it is a logical conclusion. So, let us say that indubitably certain knowledge consists of what follows from an “airtight” logical operation. That would leave a relatively narrow universe of knowledge, but at least we would have some knowledge. Such a view of knowledge, however, still consists of a reduction. It is also difficult showing on logical grounds how historical particulars can follow from governing axioms by way of logical deduction.¹⁰ Alternatively, let us say that certain knowledge consists of what can be demonstrated by the natural sciences. That too would consist of a narrower universe of knowledge, but, again, at least we would have some knowledge. And, in fact, the methodology of the natural sciences has resulted in a lot of good for human life on the physical plane, making its reductionist tendency more difficult to resist. But the reductionist tendency must be resisted.

The problem is that both the method of logical operations and the method of scientific

⁸ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 27–28.

⁹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 28.

¹⁰ See footnote six on page 170 above.

reasoning as the way of finding certainty of knowledge result in reductions. They offer a much narrower universe of knowledge and legitimate human experience than what is given by God and that we human beings actually experience in life. The world and our experience of it along with life and human society are broader, richer, and deeper, as provided by God, than both those ways of knowing provide. Moreover, both those ways of knowing bring about a reduction with respect to the nature of language. The reduction tends toward a propositional and descriptive view of language where statements are either true or false and subject to verification pursuant to rationalistic or scientific methodologies. Such things as promises, commands, and declarations that create institutions cannot be recognized or are marginalized. This is a significant problem in theology if the Scriptures include promises, commands, and declarations that create faith and institutions, and if, in fact, these things are central to the biblical narrative and what that narrative tells us about God's relationship to us and our relationship to God.

The theological appraisal of skepticism can also call into question Descartes' "all or nothing" burden of proof by understanding that Descartes' burden of proof calls for perfection. But what does Christian theology say about a quest for perfection? It should be able to say that the fact that you cannot absolutely prove you are not mistaken is, from the Christian standpoint, not a problem. It is, rather, what goes with being a creature and finite. Searle, ironically, provides an insight that can show the theologian how perfection is not an appropriate standard of proof due to human sinfulness. In his comments on this point, Searle speaks of skepticism and Descartes' burden of proof as "antirealism." Searle poignantly comments about the motivation behind "all forms of antirealism," which he thinks became obvious in the twentieth century. Searle thinks that antirealism "satisfies a basic urge to power."¹¹ He states that

¹¹ Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 17.

[i]t just seems too disgusting, somehow, that we should have to be at the mercy of the “real world.” It seems too awful that our representations should have to be answerable to anything but us. This is why people who hold contemporary versions of antirealism and reject the correspondence theory of truth typically sneer at the opposing view. Richard Rorty, for example, refers sarcastically to “Reality as It is in Itself.”¹²

It is unfortunate in this connection that Henry also criticized the correspondence theory of truth.¹³

Searle is pointing out that antirealism answers the urge and the need of the ego to be in utter control. It can be said on Christian terms, however, that the desire to be in utter control is a motivation that is deeply rooted in the human being’s rebellion against God. Thus, a Christian theological appraisal of skepticism can assert that Descartes’ skepticism is not a virtue but is an expression of original sin. Though Searle is no theologian, by refuting the RTP and arguing for direct realism, he makes room for human beings to be creatures, who live by faith in their Creator. This is ironic given Searle’s own metaphysical commitments to evolution and that only particles in fields of force exist. In spite of those commitments, he sees something about skepticism and human nature and aspirations to be God that Henry, for example, did not seem to see while postulating his theory of transcendental revelation.

But a Christian theological perspective could say even more about the need for indubitable certainty. The Christian theological perspective could talk about how fear drives a need to have indubitably certain knowledge. Indubitably certain knowledge can put us in control of the things we fear. Doubt, unknowing, becomes even more frightful when we are afraid. Is not a Christian answer to fear, however, faith stemming from the promises of God, in and through which the Holy Spirit works? This Christian answer in turn would require a broader view of theological

¹² Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 17–18.

¹³ Henry, *GRA* 1:237, where he criticizes Clark Pinnock for “urg[ing] us to subscribe to a correspondence theory of truth.”

language to include promises and their nature and structure. The point here is how the promises of God can mitigate how fear can be a driving force toward the need for indubitable certainty. Christian theology could also talk about how guilt or the inherent spiritual problem of humans having to justify themselves could be drives toward indubitable certainty. The standard must be perfection, for if there is even the slightest failure in assuaging the guilt or in the quest for justification, then the guilt remains unassuaged, and one has fallen short of justifying oneself. These theological analyses could then open up a broader view of theological language than just descriptive statements and propositions.

The biggest problem for theology is that skepticism or the need for indubitable certainty can drive Christian theology in directions that constitute distortions of Christianity and blindness toward our own creatureliness, finitude, and brokenness. Skepticism creates demands that theologians can think they need to meet—which they really cannot. But the demand itself is not justified. When theologians try to meet the skeptical demand, which is the requirement of certainty, impasses and distortions arise. It would be better for Christian theology not to be tempted by the skeptic to go beyond where our humanness given by God and our human brokenness cannot take us. It would be a better witness by theologians not to be tempted by the skeptic to go beyond the Gospel. Not going beyond would be more consistent with Christian self-description and the taxonomy of the Gospel. But this would require departing from the foundationalism of modern idealism in its framework of what counts as knowledge and how we come to know, including its demand for justification.

In any event, I argue that skepticism drives the issues of historicity, the meaning of revelation, and the nature of theological language in theology. I also argue that Speech Act Theory can provide some insights to aid theology in dealing with these issues. To these issues I

now turn.

The Issue of Historicity

Historicity can be brought into focus as an example of an issue that has been important to Christian theology for quite some time, where the foundationalism of modern philosophy has had a direct impact. The issue of historicity can bring to light specific difficulties that come about in theology due to skepticism and the framework of modern idealism that has manifested itself in opposing schools of thought and significant impasses and distortions. It serves, therefore, as a real issue in theology to which insights from Speech Act Theory can be brought to bear in getting beyond some impasses and distortions.

By “historicity” I mean the issue of whether and how we can affirm that an act of God in physical reality that is testified to in the Scriptures, which would otherwise be thought of as miraculous, actually happened. As such, “historicity” implicates whether the Scriptures are historically true and accurate in testifying to those actions of God, since the Scriptures provide the only way from our vantage point in time by which we can know anything about those divine actions. In other words, we are not “eye-witnesses” of those events.¹⁴ An action of God that comes into immediate focus and, again, can be paradigmatic, is Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.¹⁵ Did it really happen? How can we be sure? And how do these questions involve the Bible

¹⁴ It should be recognized, however, that the Scriptures are not the only immediate way people can come to know about the resurrection of Jesus. People can also come to know about Jesus’ resurrection in the living Gospel tradition of the church, in which people can come into contact with the church’s preaching, services, liturgy, church year, tried and tested songs, and the testimony of Christians. These things consist of the church’s living tradition and witness, as normed and inspired by the testimony of Scripture, which are also called into doubt by Cartesian skepticism and modern idealism.

¹⁵ We could say that there are actually three central, “miraculous,” and paradigmatic events portrayed in the Scriptures along this line. They are creation, the Exodus (meaning the people of Israel being led out of Egypt by Moses and going through the Red Sea on dry ground, a wall of water on their right and a wall of water on their left (Exod. 14:22)), and Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. With respect to Jesus we could refer more broadly to the “Christ event,” including the virgin birth, Jesus’ healing miracles, His death on the cross, the giving of the Holy

and biblical interpretation?

An Example that Illustrates the Issue: Frei and Henry

The issue of historicity can be illustrated by a dialogue that occurred between Hans Frei and Carl Henry in the 1980s. The dialogue began with Henry's criticism of "narrative theology," in which he also offered criticism of Frei's approach to the Bible as "realistic narrative."¹⁶ As Henry remarked, "narrative theology ... focuses attention on the biblical text in a new way."¹⁷ Frei called his version of "narrative theology" "realistic narrative." Frei's seminal work on this was *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*.¹⁸ In the *Eclipse*, Frei argues for Christian self-description on the basis that much of the Scripture is composed of "realistic narrative," for which hermeneutics under the influence of the modern idealism cannot account. Frei explains that on the basis of historical criticism "[t]he meaning of the narrative is something other than the narrative shape itself," such that the biblical documents are taken to "mean something other than what they say."¹⁹ In contrast to historical criticism, Frei's concept of realistic narrative is supposed to capture the contention that the subject matter of the Bible is that which is depicted in the text itself and not what comes from some other frame of reference. Similarly, the meaning of the text must also be determined from the text within the broader context of the Scriptures as realistic narrative rather than being

Spirit, and the calling and empowering of the apostles. Without the resurrection, however, there is no Christ event worth talking about that is consistent with the taxonomy of the Gospel. Each of these paradigmatic "miracles" also include many other "smaller miracles" that are also testified to by the Scriptures. Though they are smaller miracles, they are not different in kind.

¹⁶ Carl F. H. Henry, "Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal," *Trinity Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1987), 3–19.

¹⁷ Henry, "Narrative Theology," 3.

¹⁸ Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

¹⁹ Frei, *Eclipse*, 318.

brought to the text from some other source. Part of the importance of the approach of realistic narrative is to assert the unity of Scripture over against the fragmentation brought about by historical criticism. Frei contends that

[t]he task of interpretation is to garner the sense of the narrative and not interfere with it by uniting historical and/or narrative sequence with a logically distinct meaning that may be either the interpreter's own perspective or an amalgam of narrative event and interpretation, in which it is impossible to decide how much "meaning" belongs to the event, and how much to the interpretive perspective upon it.²⁰

In short, Frei was arguing that the meaning of the biblical text should be determined by the biblical text without justification to frames of reference and ways of reasoning that are external and foreign to it. George Hunsinger explained that what Frei denies in his concept of "realistic narrative" is that historical criticism and the Scripture must be systematically correlated.²¹ A corollary of this is that faith and reason or general and special revelation do not have to be systematically correlated.

Still, Frei seemed to leave hanging whether realistic narrative is committed to holding that occurrences that are depicted in the Scripture actually happened in physical reality. This concern can arise from statements such as this:

But in accordance with our definition, even the miraculous accounts are realistic or history-like (but not therefore historical and in that sense factually true) if they do not in effect symbolize something else instead of the action portrayed. That is to say, even such miraculous accounts are history-like or realistic if the depicted action is indispensable to the rendering of a particular character, divine or human, or a particular story. (And, in fact, biblical miracles are frequently and strikingly nonsymbolic.)²²

²⁰ Frei, *Eclipse*, 36–37.

²¹ George Hunsinger, "What Can Evangelicals and Postliberals Learn from Each Other?: The Carl Henry/Hans Frei Exchange Reconsidered," *Pro Ecclesia* 5, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 172.

²² Frei, *Eclipse*, 14.

In the same vein, Frei writes elsewhere that “[a] realistic story is not necessarily history; but the difference between the two is that of reference or lack of reference, and not that of a different kind of account being appropriate in each case. On the contrary, in respect of descriptive or depictive form, history and realistic story are identical.”²³ It is important to note that Frei’s concern was that miraculous accounts *not* be taken to “symbolize something else instead of the action portrayed,” which is what liberal theology does in reliance on historical criticism. Still, what does “history-like” mean? What does Frei mean to be saying when he says that “a realistic story is not necessarily history?”

In raising these questions, it is important first to keep in mind Frei’s concern and what he was trying to accomplish. Frei was concerned about how the purpose of the text of the NT is to tell us about Jesus. Reading the text narratively means that one reads it in a manner analogous to how one would read a novel in which characters are developed within a particular context and the meaning of the character development is what *the novel itself* says. So, Frei states that “[t]he term realistic [implies] that the narrative depiction is of that peculiar sort in which characters or individual persons ... are set in the context of the external environment, natural but more particularly social.”²⁴ The point of realistic narrative is that the “subject and social setting belong together, and characters and external circumstances fitly render each other.”²⁵ The things Jesus did, therefore, are intended to tell us about Jesus, to display His character, who He is, and what He came to do. One can glean these things about Jesus from the NT without having to answer the question of reference to actual occurrence.

In making these assertions, Frei had a particular audience and context in mind. Frei

²³ Frei, *Eclipse*, 27.

²⁴ Frei, *Eclipse*, 13.

²⁵ Frei, *Eclipse*, 13.

explains that when he wrote the *Eclipse*, he had liberals much more than conservatives in mind.²⁶ Frei argued for realistic narrative in his sense against how historical criticism, in its eschewing of “miracles” as a presupposition, ended up breaking the biblical text apart and fragmenting it, which also ended up in failing to read the biblical text as a coherent picture of Jesus.²⁷ Historical criticism required that the text actually refer to events outside the text, while also discounting the possibility of miraculous events as a presupposition. As such, being able to take the biblical text literally broke down, leading to fragmentation of the text in the pursuit of determining who the Jesus of actual history was over against the “Christ of faith.”²⁸ The fragmentation of the biblical text by historical criticism occurred, given its presuppositions, because “nonmiraculous and miraculous accounts and explanations are constantly intermingled” in the biblical stories.²⁹ Historical criticism has to separate the miraculous from the nonmiraculous in order to render the “historical Jesus.” Historical criticism lost the Jesus depicted by the text in the process. Frei contends, however, that a person “can revise the text to suit [oneself] only just so far.”³⁰ Frei intended that reading the text as realistic narrative should serve as a counterproposal to historical criticism so that biblical interpretation could once again recover the Jesus actually depicted by the NT. A realistic story does not necessarily have to refer to events external to it to succeed in depicting its characters, so long as what it depicts pertains to the development of the character that the story is about. Yet, by indicating that one “can revise the text to suit [oneself] only so

²⁶ Frei, “Response,” 21.

²⁷ Frei, *Eclipse*, 14, states that “[h]istorical accounting, by almost universal modern consent, involves that the narrative satisfactorily rendering a sequence believed to have taken place must consist of events, and reasons for their occurrence, whose connections may be rendered without recourse to supernatural agency.”

²⁸ Frei, *Eclipse*, 37.

²⁹ Frei, *Eclipse*, 14.

³⁰ Frei, “Response,” 21–22.

far” suggests that Frei thought there was something factual about the biblical narrative that could not just be tampered with at will.

Nevertheless, the question remained whether Frei’s understanding of realistic narrative included an unequivocal affirmation that the events depicted in the biblical narrative actually occurred. The issue this raises for Frei is whether the narratives “refer.” This is evident in his comment that the difference between realistic narrative and history is “reference or lack of reference.”³¹ There was ambivalence about this. William Pacher identified the problem in terms of truth-value when he related that “Frei insist[ed] that the biblical narratives do not ‘mean’ by referring—either to historical facts or to ontological entities—and thereby sometimes [left] what he want[ed] to say about their truth a bit unclear.”³² “Referring” has to do with the relation of words to a real, independent reality. Placher related how Frei acknowledged the concern about whether the events depicted in the Gospels actually took place.³³ Placher suggested that Frei made progress in clearing up this question when Frei indicated that he thought it “more nearly correct” to regard the NT writers as insisting that Jesus was “factually raised” than not to think of Jesus in this way.³⁴ But “*nearly correct*” still leaves ambivalence. Hunsinger suggests that Frei’s position toward the question of historicity was that faith need not worry about historical *confirmation* of Jesus in two minimal respects. First, that “Christ’s resurrection has not been historically disconfirmed.”³⁵ Second, that the “Jesus of Nazareth, who proclaimed the Kingdom

³¹ Frei, *Eclipse*, 27.

³² Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, 163.

³³ Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, 165.

³⁴ Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, 165, citing Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Basis of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 162.

³⁵ Hunsinger, “What Can Evangelicals and Postliberals Learn,” 173.

of God's nearness, did exist and was executed."³⁶ Historical criticism has not disconfirmed the former, and has also not contradicted the latter.

Henry's concern with Frei's account of realistic narrative is that Frei leaves the question of the actual occurrence of Jesus' resurrection hanging. Henry's concern is its historicity, and, therefore, the historical accuracy of the Gospels. Henry asserts that reading the Bible narratively "does not automatically settle the question whether it much matters whether its content is fiction or history."³⁷ He finds the narrative approach to Scripture lacking because it "'brackets' historical questions by focusing simply on the text and its articles of faith."³⁸ Henry criticizes the realistic narrative approach by stating that "it is difficult to find a categorical statement that if Christ's body disintegrated in the tomb, Christian faith would be impaired."³⁹ He seems to be saying that the proponents of realistic narrative, including Frei, lack a clear and unequivocal statement in their writings that the NT account of Jesus' resurrection refers to an actual physical event that happened in history outside the biblical text, such that the text refers to that actual event, and that faith relies on the fact that the event actually occurred and that the Scripture refers to it. Thus, Henry is concerned that Frei's suggestion that the Scripture be read as realistic narrative fails to affirm its historicity.

Henry is quite right in asserting that if Jesus' body did disintegrate in the tomb, then Christian faith would be impaired. As the Apostle Paul attests in the taxonomy of the Gospel, as we have noted, if Jesus' dead body did not actually, physically live again after having been crucified and buried, then there is no basis for the promise of the Christian Gospel. And this is

³⁶ Hunsinger, "What Can Evangelicals and Postliberals Learn," 173, citing Frei, *Identity of Jesus Christ*, 48, 132, 141.

³⁷ Henry, "Narrative Theology," 4.

³⁸ Henry, "Narrative Theology," 4.

³⁹ Henry, "Narrative Theology," 13.

personal. Think of it this way. If you want to have the promise of the forgiveness of sins and the hope that you will live eternally with your body in immortality and concreated righteousness, then Jesus must have actually and physically lived again. This is basic and central to Christian hope and the Christian claim to God's plan of salvation. The Christian claim is that the Christian has nothing more than Jesus had. It also claims that the Christian has nothing less. If Jesus died and His body disintegrated in the tomb, then the Christian has no more than that. If Jesus died but then lived again in indestructible life, then the Christian will too (Rom. 6:5; 1 Cor. 15:22–23; Heb. 7:16). Jesus' actual, physical resurrection is essential to the Christian Gospel and Christian hope. As a result, it is imperative to affirm that the Scriptures and the Christian tradition actually refer to a real event in physical reality when referring to Jesus' resurrection. In the terms of the debate, it is imperative to affirm that the resurrection of Jesus was "historical," meaning, in my usage, that it actually occurred as a physical reality. If Frei's account of realistic narrative fails to be clear on this point, then that is a weakness of realistic narrative and Henry's criticism on that point is well-taken. That weakness of realistic narrative, however, should not be taken in a way that fails to recognize and appreciate what Frei was trying to accomplish over against historical critical readings of Scripture.

Even though Henry criticized realistic narrative for not clearly affirming that the NT narrative refers to things that actually happened with respect to Jesus, Henry's position with respect to what "historical" means is not as straightforward as it initially sounds. This becomes evident in what he said with respect to historical criticism, which was surprisingly equivocal, if not inconsistent. On the one hand, Henry insists that "[t]he authority of the biblical text is independent of confirmation or disconfirmation by historical critics."⁴⁰ On the other hand, Henry

⁴⁰ Henry, "Narrative Theology," 4. It is an odd feature of the dialogue between Henry and Frei that Henry did

appears to assert that historical criticism is vital in some respect in confirming the historicity of the scriptural accounts of God's actions in physical reality like the resurrection. He argued,

We must resound with an unqualified “no” when Ellingsen asks if narrative hermeneutics affirms what confessional orthodoxy does when the current theory accepts the literary authority of the narrative and embraces appropriate factual implications of the text *independently of historical criticism*. Unless the historical data are assimilated not only to faith but also *to the very history that historians probe*, the narrative exerts no claim to historical factuality.⁴¹

Having stated early in his critique of narrative theology that the Scriptures need no verification from historical criticism, Henry turns around and affirms that the biblical narrative makes no claim to “historical factuality” if the “historical data” provided by the narrative are not assimilated “to the very history that historians probe.” He argues that the factual implications of the biblical text cannot be accepted “independently of historical criticism.” Thus, it appears that Henry's view of “historical” when it comes to the Scripture cannot mean anything other than how historical critics verify an event as historical, which is to say, that historical critics affirm the historicity of an event by analogy to other events that can happen in the ordinary course of nature. He reveals where his concept of history is coming from when he says that “[t]he notion that the narrative simply as narrative adequately nurtures faith independently of all objective historical concerns sponsors a split in the relationships of faith to reason and to history that would in principle encourage skepticism and cloud historical referents in obscurity.”⁴² Historical criticism is the answer to skepticism about the occurrences of actual events. There must be a continuity for Henry between faith and reason and, therefore, between faith and the methodology

not seem to recognize that Frei would largely agree with Henry's contention about the independence of the biblical text. One of Frei's concerns was that the text not be subject to verification by external frames of reference, which is what historical criticism requires.

⁴¹ Henry, “Narrative Theology,” 11, emphasis added.

⁴² Henry, “Narrative Theology,” 11.

of the historical critic, or skepticism would result, and historical referents would become obscured. He is reflecting here with respect to Biblical interpretation the correlation between revelation and reason for which he already argued in his doctrine of transcendental revelation in response to skepticism. This is public theology at work. His view also converges with the methodology of biblical interpretation that is characteristic of liberal theology.

One conclusion that can be reached as result of this dialogue is that the issue of historicity is beset by confusions and an impasse. There was an impasse between Frei and Henry. Henry thought that the historicity of the NT and the resurrection of Jesus must have “first-order importance,”⁴³ whereas he thought such concerns were “bracketed” by Frei in his approach of realistic narrative.⁴⁴ Henry requires “objective” confirmation of the historicity of the events portrayed in the Bible, where objective presumably means independent verification from a non-prejudiced source.⁴⁵ For Frei, the historicity of the NT does not need to be confirmed by an independent source in order for the NT documents to portray Jesus for Christian faith (and theology) as incarnate, crucified, and risen. Yet, Henry thought that Frei did not unequivocally affirm that the text of Scripture refers to events that actually happened in physical reality in time and space. On the other hand, Frei, over against historical criticism, argued that the biblical text needs no confirmation from independent sources, either with respect to the occurrence of events nor with respect to meaning, and it is most especially with meaning that he was concerned. Henry on his part did not seem to grasp this point of Frei’s concept of realistic narrative. Yet, Frei still did not make clear whether the text referred to actual events.

⁴³ Henry, “Narrative Theology,” 11. By “first-order” importance I take Henry to mean that establishing the biblical text’s “historicity” is of first and primary concern before the text can be used in theology.

⁴⁴ Henry, “Narrative Theology,” 4.

⁴⁵ Hunsinger, “What Can Evangelicals and Postliberals Learn,” 169.

The confusion relates to just what extent Scripture's claims need to be confirmed by historical criticism. In one breath, Henry says that they do not need to be so attested. In another breath, he affirms that Christian claims must be attested by historical criticism or there is a split between faith and reason. Frei does not agree that the biblical text needs confirmation from an external source, most especially not with respect to what it means. On this point, Henry appears to misunderstand where the issue really lay for Frei. Henry did not seem to grasp that Frei was disagreeing with the contention that Scripture must be attested to by historical criticism in order to be believed. Henry argued that if the Scriptures were not attested to by historical criticism, then skepticism would result. There must be objective confirmation. Skepticism toward the resurrection of Jesus must be conclusively defeated or Christians cannot have faith in the resurrection of Jesus. Such confirmation must be external to the resurrection itself or it would not be "objective." But Henry ends up arguing that the only way to defeat skepticism is by subjecting the Scriptures to the judgement of reason. Faith and reason must be correlated. Henry's view requires that skepticism can only be avoided if the events depicted in the Bible are objectively verified on the same methods as historical criticism. The problem of skepticism is showing itself: The Bible in its testimony to God's actions in physical reality must be "objectively" verified.

Thus, what Henry means by "historical" in relation to the Scripture seems to be confused and to concede that eye-witness testimony of the disciples needs independent confirmation. He is reflecting the demands of modern philosophy that everything must justify itself at the bar of human reason. It was precisely this sense of "historical" that made Frei ambivalent about affirming the "historicity" of the biblical narrative.⁴⁶ He did not want to affirm historicity when

⁴⁶ Frei, "Response," 23–24.

“historical” meant confirmation of the biblical narrative by an external frame of reference, as in historical criticism. Arguing against such confirmation was the point of his account of realistic narrative.

Skepticism and the need for indubitable certainty drive this impasse and these confusions. Skepticism drives the question of whether the Scriptures refer to actual events. Henry contends that skepticism must be met in an objective way and, therefore, affirms historical criticism. Frei was trying to avoid being pushed by skepticism into having to attest to the Scripture’s historicity by independent means. He was trying to avoid playing skepticism’s game. But he did not seem to be able to unequivocally affirm Scripture’s historicity in spite of the game, though he may have later.⁴⁷

Part of the problem for Frei, if I understand him, was that the word “historical” is not as straightforward a term as one might think when it comes to God’s actions in physical reality and pertaining to Jesus. He did not think that saying that Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14), for example, is a fact like any other fact. He cited Austin Farrer sympathetically when Farrer remarked that people thought they could secure the notion of creation if they could find an analogy to it, but that then if they found an analogy to it, they would lose it.⁴⁸ Frei argued that the Scripture’s reference to these things “is historical reference (to use our cultural category) but it is not historical reference in the ordinary way: nor of course is it metaphor.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Frei, “Response,” 23; Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, 165, citing Frei, *Identity of Jesus Christ*, 162.

⁴⁸ Frei, “Response,” 24. The point is that an analogy to creation would require there being another creation *ex nihilo* by the only God that exists to which the creation *ex nihilo* by the only God that exists could be compared; but that is absurd. If there is only one God that exists and one act of creation *ex nihilo*, which there must be or the concept of creation *ex nihilo* is meaningless, then there is nothing else to compare it to. In other words, there can only be one event of creation *ex nihilo*. The phrase “*ex nihilo*” comes from Latin and means “out of nothing.” It affirms that nothing existed before God engaged in the act of creation.

⁴⁹ Frei, “Response,” 24.

I think what Frei was trying to say was that when it comes to historicity in the methodology of biblical interpretation, “historical” is a loaded and not straightforward term, and he was not sure what to say about it because the actions of God that the Scriptures portray are not ordinary, that is, they have no analogy in the ordinary course of nature, which is what historical criticism requires. They are utterly unique. As such, they could not be objectively verified in the way that historical critics go about their business. In that respect, the events in physical reality portrayed in the Scriptures do not refer in the way historical critics think of referring. Does that make them “historical” or not? It may be the case that Frei provides less than an “unequivocal affirmation” of Scripture’s historicity, but that would be consistent for Frei in view of his ambivalence toward the “idea” of “historicity” as held by historical criticism.

Frei did not know what to think about the impasse he experienced with Henry and was not sure what the way forward could be. In his words, he was looking for a way to articulate “a relation between Christian theology and philosophy that disagree[d] with a view of certainty and knowledge which liberals and evangelicals hold in common.”⁵⁰ His dialogue with Henry left him unable to articulate how to get beyond the impasse. What is ironic, which Henry did not seem to grasp, is that Frei saw no methodological difference between Henry and liberals or historical critics on the issue of historical verification, for historical critics also require that the Scripture’s historicity must be attested to by independent sources using the accepted canons of historical criticism. The difference is that historical critics contend that Scripture fails the test, at least with respect to miraculous events like the resurrection, such that those events cannot be deemed historical, while Henry and conservatives think that the Scriptures do not fail the test.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Frei, “Response,” 24.

⁵¹ Asserting that the Scriptures do not fail the test over against the results of historical critical investigation creates a contradiction in methodology and runs the risk of leaving the affirmation of orthodox results a matter of

It should be noted that Henry also appeals to another way to attest to the historicity of the events depicted in the Bible that, I contend, also comports with the framework of modern idealism. In the face of skepticism and historical criticism, Henry appeals to a *certain view* of the inspiration of Scripture as the way of affirming the historicity of the events that Scripture portrays. What is significant about this is that, with respect to independent verification of historical events depicted in the Scripture, his view of the inspiration of Scripture is a *logically prior claim*, logically prior to the events. Hunsinger describes this when he states that for Henry

[t]he authority of Scripture is seen as grounded in its divine inspiration, and this inspiration is then seen as the source of inerrancy in all matters of factuality and truth. Whereas inspiration is the cause of inerrancy, inerrancy is the ultimate ground of truth. The doctrine of inerrancy thus emerges from Henry's account with a peculiar logical status and conceptual force.⁵²

The point is that the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, for Henry, functioned as an independent way of attesting to the events portrayed in Scripture, where independent means a way other than by the events themselves. Such a view of the logical relation of inspiration to historicity fits within the modern idealist framework that is skeptical of occurrences in physical reality. Such skepticism must be answered by a sure and certain method of objective verification that is independent of those occurrences. What Henry does not realize is that his view of inspiration assumes the skeptical position that Scripture needs independent attestation for the historicity of the events it portrays. In his words there must be an "Archimedean lever that *lifts us above the narrative*," that can confirm the historicity of the narrative.⁵³ This Archimedean lever involves an "articulate view of revelation and reason and of revelation and history, and a public

willful assertion, since historical critical methodology cannot support those results.

⁵² Hunsinger, "What Can Evangelicals and Postliberals Learn," 170.

⁵³ Henry, "Narrative Theology," 13, emphasis added.

test of truth.”⁵⁴ In that sense, inspiration of Scripture for Henry functions as the answer to the demands of skepticism imposed by the epistemology of modern idealism.

Inspiration of Scripture can objectively verify the resurrection, for Henry, because “[o]bjective reality is found only in the propositions in God’s mind.”⁵⁵ There is no objective reality in the resurrection as a physical event for Henry. Inspiration for Henry becomes a process by which the propositions in God’s mind become propositions in the mind of the human writer. Henry states that “[a]s an achievement of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, Scripture presents us with the remarkable phenomenon of a canon concerned primarily with the propositional disclosure of God.”⁵⁶ Thus, Scripture is objective because it is inspired in the sense that inspiration put the propositions in God’s mind into the mind of the human writers, which they then reduced to writing. Francis Pieper talks about inspiration in a comparable way when he says that the Holy Spirit “impelled” the prophets and apostles in their special calling “to *reduce* God’s own Word to writing (*in litteras redigere* (reduce to letters or writings)).”⁵⁷

The concern here is that this type of view of inspiration appears to operate transcendently independently of the history attested to by the Scriptures. Inspiration must operate transcendently in order to be able to attest to that history, that is, to be able to independently

⁵⁴ Henry, “Narrative Theology,” 14.

⁵⁵ Henry, *GRA*, 5:389. Henry reduces Scripture to propositions, which is a penchant of American Evangelicalism. Francis Schaeffer does the same thing. Certainly, Scripture does make statements, but to reduce Scripture to propositions ignores the fact that Scripture speaks in narrative, in letters, in poetry, in express commands, and in promises. Commands and promises are not verifiable. They are to be obeyed or believed.

⁵⁶ Henry, *GRA*, 3:96. By way of contrast Henry does not say that Scripture presents us with a Holy Spirit inspired testimony of the apostles to the events they actually witnessed.

⁵⁷ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, ed. Theodore Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 231. Keep in mind that I do not doubt that the Scripture is inspired with respect to the very words of Scripture. The point is just how inspiration took place, and whether the theory of inspiration put forward by Henry and Pieper connects inspiration to the economy of salvation or operates in a manner consistent with the framework of modern idealism. It would seem important that a theory of inspiration comport with the economy of salvation rather than the framework of modern idealism, because that framework is otherwise quite foreign to the Scriptures and cannot account for the apostles actually seeing the events to which their inspired testimony, as contained in Scripture, points.

verify it. Accordingly, this theory of inspiration unwittingly subscribes to the theory that sense perception needs other evidence to attest to the existence of the object sensed. Such other evidence could only be provided transcendentally, if it cannot be provided by historical analogy, that is, by historical criticism.

It is an odd result to have inspiration attest to historical events in a manner that is independent of the history to which it purports to attest. But if we step back from the Christian language of “inspiration” being used here we can see the framework of modern idealism in operation. Modern idealism starts with skepticism toward sense perception such that sense perception does not give reliable knowledge of the external world. The “objective” way of providing such knowledge is a transcendental operation going on in the mind of the human knowing subject. Skepticism toward “miraculous” events depicted in Scripture needs to be answered in the same way in order to find “objective” certainty, the Archimedean lever. Inspiration as an operation in the mind of the human writers by which God downloads the propositions in His mind to the mind of the human writers can provide the “objective” verification of the events. But this is just because those events need such verification. The fact of the eye-witnessing of those events by sense perception is not good enough attestation. But then the problem of attestation is just pushed back to the theory of inspiration itself. Is reason called upon once again for verification of inspiration or are we just left with mere willful assertion? It would seem to be better to avoid being drawn into skepticism’s game.

Having raised the impasse involved in the issue of historicity, is there any way in which the impasse can be addressed? How can we characterize the issue? I suggest that there are two sub-issues involved. One relates to whether observing Jesus alive requires evidence for the contention that Jesus was alive again. The other involves the relationship between the unique or

particular and the general, or singularities in relation to the ordinary course of nature. Frei described the tension between the unique and the general when he framed the problem of foundationalism in relationship to Christian self-description as the tension between whether Christianity will be treated according to its own uniqueness or “as an instance in a general class.”⁵⁸ The epistemology of modern idealism pushes for general criteria that can apply to any discipline and any question.⁵⁹ This follows from skepticism since sense perception apprehends particulars. If the accuracy of the perception of particulars is called into question, then their existence must be justified on the basis of an epistemology that is universally applicable. With respect to historical criticism, this means that by definition modern historical method cannot recognize “someone who is an exception to the rules under which the method works.”⁶⁰ The natural sciences cannot account for singularities that are inconsistent with regularities of nature operating on natural laws. The whole purpose of identifying natural laws is to be able to predict what will happen in the future; there must be regularity. Similarly, historical criticism does not know how to handle uniqueness, uniqueness in occurrences and utterly unique persons, like Jesus Christ, who could not be predicted. So, a problem for theory is how to account for the particular without having to justify it on the terms of the general. Or it is how to account for uniqueness in relation to the ordinary course of nature. Putting this in the context of historicity, the problem is how to account for an occurrence of God’s action in physical reality as “historical,” that is, as having actually occurred, without it having to be justified either by historical criticism or a transcendently conceived theory of inspiration of Scripture. Is there a way to account for the historicity of Scripture without historical criticism; history but not

⁵⁸ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 20.

⁵⁹ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 20.

⁶⁰ Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 10.

historical criticism? Frei recognizes this question but did not have an answer to it.⁶¹ There is something that can be said. Insights from Speech Act Theory provide conceptuality to say it.

Before turning to the insights of Speech Act Theory, it should be said that many historians would not agree with historical critics with respect to methodology when it comes to historical investigation. Historians usually take ancient accounts and sources like the Bible at face value, assuming that the authors meant what they said, unless there is good reason to doubt that being the case. Historians might be skeptical at times in their estimation of what such sources say, but they tend to use the sources as they are and respect what the people of the day believed about them. Historical critics, on the other hand, impose litmus tests on texts in order to determine whether the content of the sources agrees with their own view of reality. Historians, as a whole, do not operate in such a manner. In addition, historians tend to eschew pattern seeking, which historical critics pursue in search of comparisons, that is, analogies based on the regularities of nature, and do not trust those that find them, fearing that such patterns are in the mind of the interpreter and imposed on the source or text from outside the text. Historians prefer to leave pattern seeking as a way to verify occurrences of events to sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, psychologists, and the like. As a result, historians do not operate with a methodology that is inherently hostile to the biblical text.

Applying Insights from Speech Act Theory

I argue that Speech Act Theory can provide some helpful insights in response to the confusions and impasses of the question of historicity. This help can come from Searle's analysis of the intentionality of sense perception and the conditions of satisfaction relating to the structure

⁶¹ Frei, "Response," 24.

of the speech act, particularly the speech act of promise. Both Searle's treatment of intentionality with respect to sense perception and his treatment of the conditions of satisfaction relating to the speech act of promise can provide conceptuality to account for the uniqueness of the occurrences of God's actions in physical reality over against the general, as reflected in the ordinary course of nature. Being able to account for the particular irrespective of the general is important in defeating the perceived necessity for historical criticism. I consider first Searle's insights into the intentionality of sense perception.

There are several aspects of Searle's presentation of the intentionality of sense perception that are of help here. First, Searle argued that the intentionality of sense perception is self-referential. This means that sense perception of any object brings with it its own conditions of satisfaction. Conditions of satisfaction are not imposed on it from outside the perceptual experience. Such conditions of satisfaction require that the object be directly sensed. Thus, my visual experience of seeing my poodle brings with it the condition of satisfaction that can only be satisfied if my poodle is actually there and is the object of my visual experience. Associated with this were the concepts of direction of fit and direction of causation. The direction of fit in sense perception is mind-to-world, meaning that my visual experience must conform to the world. Thus, my visual experience of my poodle must conform to my poodle actually being there if I am having a visual experience of my poodle. In addition, the direction of causation means that the object in the world must be the cause of my visual experience. The conditions of satisfaction of the visual experience require this. Thus, the conditions of satisfaction of my visual experience of my poodle requires that my poodle be the actual cause of the propositional content of my visual experience of my poodle. To apply this to the resurrection of Jesus simply replace the words "my poodle" with the words "Jesus being physically alive again" and treat the visual experience as

that of the women and disciples who saw Jesus, touched Him, and heard Him alive again. The conditions of satisfaction of seeing, touching, and hearing Jesus alive again require that Jesus be actually there and the object of such perceptual experiences.

Notice what the conditions of satisfaction of my seeing my poodle does not include. It does not include verification by a general theory of knowledge independent of my visual experience to verify that I am really seeing what I am actually seeing. There is no gap between my visual experience and the object that a general theory of knowledge could step into in order to confirm or disconfirm the existence of the object of my visual experience. The conditions of satisfaction of sense perception do not require extraneous evidence to confirm that what I am seeing actually exists. There was no gap between the women and apostles seeing Jesus alive again and Jesus actually being there alive again as the object of their seeing.

I can imagine someone objecting to this by saying: “Okay, what about UFOs? People claim to be seeing them, but there is much doubt and skepticism about whether UFOs in the sense of extra-terrestrials actually exist. Does this account of sense perception imply that we should accept the fact that extra-terrestrials exist just because some people have claimed to have seen them?” That would be an interesting objection. It helps in sharpening a key point, which is: A claim to have seen something, including extra-terrestrials or the risen Jesus, cannot be objected to or doubted merely because one has *claimed* to have seen it. That is what historical criticism does.

The response to the objection relates to having a shared world. On Searle’s account of direct realism, visual experience of an object that is really there is an experience of a *shared world* that is accessible to sense perception by many people together. Whatever is claimed to be seen must be able to be a shared visual experience. This is the peculiar thing about UFO’s. If

UFOs are so prevalent, then why don't they show themselves to be a shared experience? It is relevant to recall that the NT claims that the resurrection of Jesus meets this criterion. In the Gospel accounts, Jesus appeared to groups of women (Matt. 28:1–9; John 20:1, 11–16), to the two men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35), and to at least the eleven disciples gathered together in the upper room (Luke 24:33, 36–48; John 20:19–29). In addition, the Apostle Paul asserts, as part of the Christian tradition that he received, that Jesus appeared alive again to more than five hundred followers of Jesus at once (1 Cor. 15:3, 6). It is also significant that the NT asserts that Jesus appeared repeatedly alive again after the crucifixion to his disciples over the course of forty days (Acts 1:3).

Is all of this attested so as to be irrefutable proof that could satisfy the skeptic and the skeptical historical critic? No. We recall that there really is no way to satisfy the skeptic. It is all to point out that the NT accounts of Jesus being seen, touched, and heard as living again subsequent to His crucifixion and burial satisfy the conditions of satisfaction of sense perception and direct realism. This enables an account of the uniqueness of the event of Jesus' resurrection without having to appeal to general criteria in order to justify believing it actually occurred. It accounts for affirming the event without its uniqueness disqualifying it and without needing verification from historical criticism. We could say it is "historical," without historical criticism.

The fact that sense perception does not need an appeal to general criteria was discussed by Searle and also argued for by Austin, who provided the example of seeing the pig. If the question is whether the pig exists, the point of Austin's illustration was that one could point to all kinds of evidence that the pig exists, like feed pots in the vicinity, hearing snorting, smelling pig manure, and such things. But when the pig appears and you see it, there is no need for further evidence. You just see the pig. In this connection, Searle makes the point that "[s]eeing is the way of

knowing.”⁶² So, seeing was the way of knowing for those who had the opportunity according to the grace and good pleasure of God to see the living Jesus with their eyes and touch him with their hands and hear Him speak with His own voice. But again, no further evidence was needed for them as to the existence of what they were seeing.

A further account, however, is needed for us since we were not eyewitnesses. For one thing, there is the question of the reliability of the witnesses, and Speech Act Theory does not touch on this. But Speech Act Theory does help us account for how the eye-witnessing of the event became preaching such that those who were not eye-witnesses could hear the account of what was seen and believe it too, and down through the centuries to us. This is just exactly what has happened. The most important instance of this would be the original sense perception turning into the speech acts that we know as the Scriptures.

I turn now to the speech act of promise. Having used the conditions of satisfaction relating to the intentionality of sense perception to address the impasses and confusions relating to historicity brought about modern idealism, I now turn to how Searle’s account of the conditions of satisfaction of the speech act of a promise can be of help with respect to the impasse regarding historicity. Keep in mind that the issue of historicity is how to account for a unique event over against the methodology that historical criticism uses. Historical criticism, operating on the methodology of reductive science, wants to dictate what could or could not happen by comparison of events or by an appeal to general criteria. This amounts to dictating what could or could not happen on the basis of how things regularly occur in the ordinary course of nature. This methodology, by definition, cannot account for an event that has no analogy and does not fit within what should happen in the ordinary course of nature.

⁶² Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are*, 220.

Searle's account of the conditions of satisfaction of a promise can get us beyond the inability of historical criticism to account for unique events. This is because it is a condition of satisfaction of a promise that what is promised should not occur in the ordinary course of events. To get at this, assume that Jesus makes a promise to Alice by speaking a sentence to Alice which Alice hears: "I, Jesus, promise to raise you, Alice, from the dead on the last day" (cf. John 6:40). The sentence itself is a locutionary act. It contains an illocutionary act, the force of which is the making of a promise. It can be expressed in the technical notation like this: Jesus → Promises (Alice will rise from the dead on the last day). It contains "propositional content," which is that Jesus will raise Alice from the dead on the last day.⁶³

There are several things to observe. First, we notice that Jesus' promise contains propositional content. A promise must have propositional content. It must include just what it is that the promisor promises to do.⁶⁴ One cannot make an empty promise. It would make no sense for Jesus to say, "I promise to ..." and then say nothing more. Since the propositional content involves what the promisor promises to do, the propositional content pertains to the occurrence of something in physical reality. In this case it involves raising Alice from the dead on the last day. In addition, the propositional content must be in the best interests of the person receiving the promise. It must consist of something the recipient would want done. It would make no sense for Jesus to promise to Alice that He will raise her from the dead on the last day if that were not something that would be in her best interests and not something she would want done.⁶⁵ In this

⁶³ I do not have the space here to present Searle's analysis of the conditions of satisfaction of the speech act of promise in all of its detail. There is more to it than what I will discuss here. I am just pulling out the salient points that are relevant to the issue of historicity that I am discussing. The full account of his analysis can be found in his book on speech acts. See Searle, *Speech Acts*, 57–64.

⁶⁴ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 57.

⁶⁵ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 58–59.

sense, a promise is to be distinguished from a threat.⁶⁶ But it also means that a promise does not involve conforming to disinterested, general criteria.

Second—and this is key to the issue of historicity and the relationship of the unique to the general, whatever the person making the promise promises to do, it must not be obvious that such a thing would be done in the ordinary course of events or nature anyway. In Jesus' promise to raise Alice on the last day, it must be the case that Alice would not otherwise rise from the dead on the last day in the ordinary course of events. If Alice will rise from the dead anyway on the last day in the way nature ordinarily works, then there would be no point to the promise.⁶⁷ The promise would be empty. Suppose that Alfred promises to build a house for Tom, which Tom promises to pay for. If the house would be built in the ordinary course of events anyway, then there would be no point in Alfred promising to build it, and Tom certainly would not promise to pay Alfred to build it if it would be built anyway.

This condition of satisfaction has a huge implication. Historical criticism, operating on the methodology of reductive science, wants to dictate what could or could not happen on the basis of how things happen in the ordinary course of events. The determination of whether something can happen on the terms of reductive science is whether it happens ordinarily and predictably according to the laws of nature. Historical criticism uses the same methodology in the study of history but then analyzes events according to analogy with other events or just according to whether one would expect something to happen in the ordinary course of nature. This excludes

⁶⁶ This condition of satisfaction distinguishes between a threat or warning and a promise. An employer, for example, may “promise” to fire an employee if the employee does not perform the duties of the job. Such a sentence, however, amounts to a threat or a warning, not a promise, because getting fired would not be something the employee would want and firing the employee is not doing something for him or her. This raises the question as to why English speakers can make threats by using the words “I promise.” Searle, *Speech Acts*, 58, thinks that English speakers sometimes make threats using the words “I promise” because to promise is “among the strongest illocutionary indicating devices for *commitment* provided in the English language [emphasis original].”

⁶⁷ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 59.

unique, “miraculous” events, by definition.⁶⁸ Thus, there is no basis in historical criticism to believe that Alice will rise on the last day in the ordinary course of events. Historical criticism could not compute such a thing. A promise, however, accounts for it. This condition of satisfaction of a promise, therefore, provides that it is no valid objection if what God does pursuant to a promise cannot be accounted for pursuant to general criteria, pursuant to what the laws of nature determine could happen in the ordinary course of nature. Thus, it is no objection that what God promises to do could not be accounted for on the grounds that the event is unique, singular, has no analogy in history, and will not be repeated. This is because in order for a promise to be a promise, the promisor must be promising something to the recipient of the promise that the recipient would not expect to happen in the ordinary course of things but for the promise.

This means that there is no requirement from the standpoint of reason that an action of God in physical reality, performed according to a promise must be accounted for on the basis of historical criticism and the natural sciences. In fact, people routinely make promises to each other in human society. The making of promises is not unique, and reason recognizes it. But reason also recognizes that when people make promises to each other, they are promising to do things that would not happen in the ordinary course of nature but for the promise. The speech act of promise works the same way in God’s promises to us. Thus, since we would not expect that what God promises to do for us would happen in the ordinary course of events, an event taking place according to God’s promise can be historical, without being subject to attestation by historical criticism.

This is bolstered by an additional and important condition of satisfaction of a promise. It is

⁶⁸ Frei, *Eclipse*, 14, 53.

that the maker of the promise intends to fulfill the promise. Searle calls this the “sincerity condition.”⁶⁹ It involves the actual intent to do what the promisor said he or she would do, which includes the implication that the promisor has the ability to do it. Thus, when Jesus promises to Alice that He will raise her from the dead on the last day, He is communicating to her His sincere intention to do that and His ability to do it. A contention on the part of an historical critic that God’s actions performed in physical reality according to promise are impossible has the problem in the context of the Scriptures of calling God’s sincerity into question as well as His ability to do what He promises. Doing so poses a serious *theological* problem.

This analysis of the conditions of satisfaction of a promise works for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus if He rose according to promise. So, did Jesus rise from the dead according to promise? Two examples indicate that He did. One is this statement: “You will not let your holy one to see corruption” (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:25–31). Another example consists of the instances where Jesus Himself promised that He would rise again on the third day after being killed (e.g., Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; Mark 10:34; Luke 18:33). Here, incidentally, is a way that promise can bolster narrative theology’s argument for the unity of Scripture.

Thus, based on Searle’s insights into the intentionality of sense perception and the conditions of satisfaction of a promise, we can say that the resurrection of Jesus is historical, but not established by historical criticism. It is history, but it does not need the justification of historical criticism, satisfying Frei’s concern. The Gospels could be affirmed as realistic narrative that actually refers, satisfying Henry’s concern. The resurrection also does not need to be established by a prior theory of transcendental inspiration. This can encourage thinking about inspiration in a way that is consistent with the way the relationship of the Holy Spirit to Jesus

⁶⁹ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 60.

and His words and deeds is actually talked about in the Scriptures, such that the inspiration tracks with the revelation of God's salvation taking place in and through historical occurrences, and not apart from them (e.g., Matt. 3:16 and 4:1; Matt. 12:28; John 14:26; John 15:26–27; John 16:14; Acts 2:4, 14).

This discussion of how the structure of the speech act of promise can help with the issue of historicity also has implications for the meaning of revelation and theological language. To this consideration I now turn.

Revelation and Theological Language

One of the ways a theologian can think of meeting the challenge of skepticism is by way of revelation. What does this mean but having God's very own thoughts on the subject? Since they are God's thoughts, they are certain. Henry asserts that "[o]bjective reality is found only in the propositions in God's mind."⁷⁰ But then some other questions come into view. God's thoughts about what? In other words, what are the issues? How does God give us His thoughts? In other words, what is the manner and form of revelation? What form of language should we think God's thoughts should be most clearly expressed in? In other words, how does our concept of revelation inform and shape our concept of theological language. And to what should revelation be given in the human knowing subject? In other words, to what faculty of the human knower should revelation be addressed? In the foundationalist framework of modern idealism, these questions are driven in a certain way. The problems start with the very first question: What do we need to know?

Henry contends that revelation is given to reason to provide objective knowledge "that God

⁷⁰ Henry, *GRA*, 5:389.

does in fact exist, that the world really exists, and that other selves actually exist.”⁷¹ He contends that “[d]ivine revelation is the source of *all* truth, the truth of Christianity included; *reason* is the instrument for recognizing it.”⁷² We note from these assertions that the purpose of revelation for Henry is to confirm God’s existence, the existence of the world, and the existence of other selves. We also note that revelation extends to *all* truth; it is the source and confirmation of *all* knowledge. It is consistent with this purpose of revelation that it should be given to reason. It is also consistent, therefore, that revelation takes exclusively propositional form for Henry.

So, when it comes to revelation in relation to the Scriptures, Henry is focusing on the wrong question. It is not that God’s existence and how the created order came into existence are not valid Christian questions; they certainly are. It is that they are not the only questions. It is also the case that the doctrine of creation is intended to call forth faith, as well as provide information. Thus, when modern idealism is driving the questions because of its skepticism and correlative need for indubitable certainty, theologians can end up distorting Christianity’s own understanding of God and the Gospel and how God relates to us by Law and Gospel in Jesus Christ.

Modern idealism held that an epistemology is needed that provides certainty for affirming that the external world exists and how it works. Descartes needed God to provide this certainty. With Kant, the question of God drops out of urgency in *philosophical* thought because Kant argued, unlike Descartes, that speculative reason cannot prove the existence of God.⁷³ Kant’s arguments, however, make being able to provide rational proof for the existence of God a matter

⁷¹ Henry, *GRA*, 1:57.

⁷² Henry, *GRA*, 1:215, emphasis added.

⁷³ See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 485–531. Though Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 531, also contends that speculative reason cannot *disprove* the objective reality of a supreme being.

of urgency for Christian theology after Kant. If it is held that believing in God's existence is critically connected to living the right way, then it becomes even more imperative to be able to establish God's existence on the basis of a theory of revelation that is given to reason, so all people will live the right way and society will affirm the right things in all its dimensions: politics, morality, education, social values, and institutions. So, revelation must provide indubitably certain knowledge of God's existence. But then it must also do so for everyone. Where then is the revelation of the Gospel?

So, this doctrine of revelation and inspiration is problematic when viewed from the standpoint of the taxonomy of the Gospel and in conjunction with what Speech Act Theory tells us about how human beings actually use language. People use language to do much more than assert verifiable propositions. Scripture does also. Scripture tells us that God makes promises, issues commands, and engages in speech acts that create institutions. These uses of language have to do with our relationship with God. They have to do with salvation. These uses of language do not pertain to things that occur in the ordinary course of nature; that is not their purpose. As a result, they cannot be verifiable in Henry's sense of propositions. Henry's doctrine of transcendental revelation, however, must take the form of propositions. Only propositions can involve revelation that can be given to reason in order to be verified by reason so as to be objective. But when we recognize that the Scriptures are replete with speech acts that are not propositions—though they have propositional content, it becomes evident that Henry's doctrine of revelation involves a serious reduction in his account of theological language. It does not account for God's speech acts that are central to the Gospel.

This impacts the content of revelation. Propositions in Henry's understanding are aimed at providing information, and in Henry's concept, providing information about God's existence, the

existence of the world, and the existence of other minds. When Speech Act Analysis leads to the realization that the Scriptures are replete with commands, promises, and institutions, it becomes apparent that God is revealing different things to us than just what responds to the metaphysical concerns of modern idealism. God's speech acts also involve the category of relation. The speech acts of promise and command, for example, reveal God's intentions and God's will that have to do with salvation and conviction of sin and how to live. They have to do with the revelation of God's will and saving intentions, that is, God's grace and love. Henry's account of the language of revelation as propositions fails to account for the revelation of such things.

In addition, the speech acts of promise and command are given to different human faculties. They are not just given to reason but to the heart and the will to generate repentance, obedience, faith, and hope. This involves much more than just cognition. As such these speech acts and institutions are addressed to faith and repentance. In that way, they are aimed at creating faith in God's grace in Christ by which the sinner is justified before God and also to how to live in a way that is good and pleasing to God through faith. Promises and institutions pertain to faith. Commands pertain to repentance and living, by faith, in the way God wants us to, for the good. These are absolutely necessary things and central concerns of Christian theology. We could know that God exists with absolute certainty and be utterly lost not knowing His will and His grace by repentance and faith. God grace and His will, however, are known through the speech acts of proclamation, promise, and command.

Cognition is involved in these things, but so are the affects. The structure of the speech act teaches this by combining propositional content and illocutionary force in the illocutionary act, and then by recognizing the perlocutionary effect. The cognitive faculty does recognize the propositional content. But the illocutionary force is directed at the same time to the will to turn

the ego in repentance and renew it in faith. The two are distinct, but they go together. There is no great either/or between “mind” and “heart,” in the unfortunate anthropology of contemporary evangelicalism. The analysis of the speech act provided by Speech Act Theory shows us these things. It aids theology in realizing that Henry’s concept of revelation is inadequate and distorts the meaning of revelation.

Gospel and Faith

In the display of the taxonomy of the Gospel, it was noted how the Apostle Paul asserted that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). In connection with passing on the good news of Jesus’ resurrection, the Apostle asserted “so we preach and so you believed” (1 Cor. 15:11). The resurrection was seen by eye-witnesses. They preached the resurrection to others, who came to believe in it too. The apostles worked out the implications of the resurrection without regard to the fact-value split and preached the forgiveness of sins and justification by faith based on Jesus’ death and resurrection. Many of their hearers came to believe these things too. This taxonomy or pattern, found in the Scriptures and enacted in the Church, moves from God’s actions in the world in Christ to witnessing to those actions, and then to hearing, believing, and living according to those actions. But modern idealism, as we have seen, undercuts this taxonomy because it calls for an inside-out way of knowing that is based on skepticism with respect to knowledge coming from actions in the world.

Already we have seen how direct realism overcomes the disconnect between the world and the mind, that modern idealism presupposes, and promotes an unambiguous testimony to God’s action in the world. Now, in this last section, we will see how Speech Act Theory helps Christian theology with its scriptural account of how faith comes by hearing. This also provides the account of how the faith of the eye-witnesses to the resurrection was passed down through the

centuries through the church's proclamation of the Gospel.

Speech Act Theory accounts for how faith comes by hearing by making the connection between sense perception and speech, and between speech and faith. It does this first in the conditions of satisfaction, direction of fit, and direction of causation that Searle explicates with respect to sense perception. In this account the object or state of affairs in the world becomes the propositional content of a certain psychological state. In this case, the psychological state is a belief. So, let us say that the Apostle Peter saw Jesus alive again. Jesus being alive again is the propositional content of his perceptual experience of seeing Jesus alive again. That act of God in physical reality not only created the propositional content in Peter's mind, but it also created the state of belief in his mind and heart. It created both assent and the kind of faith in the resurrection that changed his soul. And here is a key result: The propositional content of his faith is also the propositional content of the seeing. Seeing and believing are two related but different things with respect to the mind, but the propositional content was the same. We could note this in technical notation like this:

Peter → Sees (that Jesus is alive again)

↓

Peter → Bel (that Jesus is alive again).

Believing that Jesus was alive again, Peter then generated a speech act of preaching wherein he preached that Jesus was alive again to others, and they believed it too, some of them. The Scriptural attestation to this is "I believed and so I spoke." (2 Cor. 4:13). This can be noted like this:

Peter → Bel (that Jesus is alive again).

↓

Peter → Preaches (that Jesus is alive again)

Peter's preaching to others can be noted like this:

Peter → Preaches (that Jesus is alive again)

↓

3000 → Believe (that Jesus is alive again) (Acts 2:41); Marissa → Believes (that Jesus is alive again)

Those who believed that Jesus is alive again can then turn around and preach it to others, and so on down through the centuries.

In this account preaching generates faith. The account is intended to show graphically what the Apostle Paul asserts in Rom. 10:17: “[F]aith comes through hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” The preaching contains propositional content, but it also addresses the affective aspects of human nature with illocutionary force to bring about change in the heart and mind, which is the perlocutionary effect; though we keep in mind that the perlocutionary effect is not automatic like billiard-ball causation. The perlocutionary effect can then be formed into a speech act by the subsequent hearer of the Gospel in telling it to others in a speech act. These considerations are then continued and repeated. And I have not even touched here on the formation of the institution of the pastoral office by a speech act that is charged with preaching the Gospel. But here is a key result: The propositional content of the preaching and the faith in subsequent hearers is the same. The structure of the illocutionary act accounts for how the assertion that Jesus rose from the dead is passed on from speech to faith to speech to faith, and so on. In this relation of the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary effect, Speech Act Theory accounts for a connection between cognition and affects. They are both involved in generating the speech act and in hearing it and believing. Cognition recognizes the propositional content,

but the illocutionary force affects the heart and the will.

Finally, Speech Act Theory is helpful to the taxonomy of the Gospel because it can account for how a promise is aimed at generating faith in the recipient of the promise, where such faith is understood as trust in the promise and, therefore, trust in the one who made it. Speech Act Theory can account for the connection between a promise and faith by identifying a couple additional conditions of satisfaction of the speech act of promise. The first such condition of satisfaction is that by uttering the speech act of promise, the person making the promise is intending to communicate his or her intention of placing himself or herself under an obligation to perform the promise. This intention is understood from the speech act itself. Thus, in Jesus' promise to Alice, it is understood pursuant to the nature of the speech act of making a promise that Jesus communicated to her His intent to place himself under an obligation to perform the propositional content of the promise. Searle calls this the "essential condition" of the promise.⁷⁴ It is essential because it is the essence of a promise that the promisor intends to place himself or herself under an obligation to do what he or she promised to do. Otherwise, the promise would be empty. The purpose of this intent is to create reliance or trust in the recipient of the promise. This accounts for the relation of promise to faith, understood as trust, in the taxonomy of the Gospel and Christian theology.

The second additional condition of satisfaction involves recognizing that the speech act of promising involves the intent of generating trust in the mind of the recipient of the promise by emphasizing the intention to communicate. This means that by making a promise, the promisor intends to communicate all the features of making a promise in order to get the recipient to believe that the promisor is placing himself or herself under an obligation to keep the promise. In

⁷⁴ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 60.

other words, in the promise to Alice, Jesus intends to generate trust in Alice by virtue of using the illocutionary act of promising, the point of which Alice will understand. Jesus wants Alice to believe that His promise is something for her benefit that will not happen in the ordinary course of nature. He wants Alice to recognize that He is placing Himself under an obligation to do something for her in coordination with the other aspects of what it means to make a promise.⁷⁵ Alice understands that this is what Jesus is trying to do based on the conventions and rules of the speech act of promising that she shares with Jesus. Hopefully, Jesus' using such shared conventions will result in the perlocutionary effect of Alice believing in the promise and trusting Jesus. If Alice does believe the promise, her faith will have the same propositional content as the promise and that propositional content will become real for her whenever the promise is fulfilled. In addition, if she says she believes it, her speech act of saying so will also have the same propositional content as the promise.

These conditions of satisfaction also indicate that meaning cannot be determined solely by the hearer in a subjective manner since Alice understands the meaning and intention of Jesus' promise on the basis of sharing the conventions of the speech act of promise with Jesus. Jesus and Alice recognize certain semantic rules that constitute Jesus placing himself under an obligation to do something for Alice. This is why Jesus used the speech act of making a promise in the first place. These semantic rules are not subjective. Thus, meaning is not subjective as determined by the ego. Rather, the ego is affected by the promise in a way that, hopefully, turns the will of the ego toward faith. In this way, the speech act overcomes subjectivism. We could use a similar analysis with respect to God's commandments, declarations, and assertives.

Therefore, Speech Act Theory can help Christian theology account for how our

⁷⁵ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 60–61.

relationship to God involves more than just cognitive knowledge in the sense of assent to propositions. More importantly, it can aid theology in elucidating over against modern idealism how our relationship with God involves trust in God's intentions and His ability to do what He has promised. As the speech act has perlocutionary effect, it counteracts subjectivism. By accounting for how speech acts do something to the ego, Speech Act Theory teaches us that we are not in control of our destiny but are surrendering control to God. It means that we are surrendering this control to God without being able to know in the way of verification, because a promise is not verifiable in that way. Since what is promised in the promise by definition has not taken place yet, there is no way for us to verify it. It can only be believed, and the promisor trusted. We surrender control to God in such faith. But then that is one of the things a promise is intended to do: It is intended to get us to believe in the sense of trust. We are close to God and know God in the most important way when we know God's intentions and are knitted to God by trust. Trust is not a universal phenomenon, though the terms of the promise can be grasped at a certain level by anyone since they are in human speech. But they cannot be accepted by way of general knowledge, by reason, without trust. In these considerations, God's speech act of promise breaks down the subjectivism and autonomy of the ego and public theology by teaching that God's promises establish a relationship to us that is not characterized by providing general knowledge. The propositional content of the promise cannot be received by the human being by the faculty of reason. In this way special revelation is preserved from becoming absorbed by general revelation. The speech act, and particularly the speech act of promise, shows the inadequacy of modern idealism for serving as a foundation for Christian theology.

So, I have shown in this project how Speech Act Theory can assist Christian theology in getting beyond the distortions and impasses that are brought about by the assumptions and

epistemological framework of modern idealism. I have shown how insights from Speech Act Theory can discredit modern idealism as providing an appropriate foundation for Christian theology. The purpose of this showing has been to open a way for Christian theology to pursue Christian self-description as set forth in the taxonomy of the Gospel for the sake of the Gospel. Speech Act Theory can be helpful to that end in providing analysis and conceptuality for direct realism with respect to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and God's other actions that occurred in physical reality, as well as for understanding God's speech acts and the institutions of the Gospel.

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