

*“Philosophia* literally means ‘love of wisdom,’ but from the ancient Greek schools to the present-day halls of academia, philosophers’ writings have more often reflected the wisdom of the world than the wisdom of the Word, and many have cast more shadow than light. Not so for John Frame’s latest masterpiece. No other survey of the history of Western thought offers the same invigorating blend of expositional clarity, critical insight, and biblical wisdom. Supplemented with study questions, bibliographies, links to famous quotes from influential thinkers, twenty appendices, and a chapter-indexed glossary, this book would be an excellent choice as the main textbook for a seminary-level course. Overtly and unrepentantly Christian in its perspective, it will be my first recommendation for believers seeking a trustworthy guide to the labyrinthine history of philosophy and theology.”

—**James N. Anderson**, Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte

“The history of secular Western philosophy traces man’s many attempts at great thoughts about God’s creation but without God. This has resulted in varied thought-systems that possess fragments of truth capable of appealing to our natural curiosity about the world. Yet without the truth of Scripture acting as the authority over beliefs and values, not only are those fragments unable to provide us with the full picture, but even the little bit they do say is not fully true. In the end, all we are left with is a lie. This was Satan’s subterfuge with the first woman. He tempted her to accept the hollowness of his lie as the truth. Since that day in the garden, Satan’s strategy has remained essentially the same. Either he presents for our consideration fraudulent evaluations of the creation in the name of philosophy or he finds ways to mix the tares of false philosophies with the truth of God’s Word in our own hearts and minds, thus confusing us about what is right. In either case, his goal is to tempt us to question what God has said. Responding to this attack, John Frame has provided an invaluable ministry to the church. He puts the history of Western philosophy in its proper context: spiritual warfare. Here we learn that philosophy is more than a set of courses in a college curriculum. It is a field of battle for the hearts and minds of billions. In these pages are exactly the resources you need to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ and to be a champion for truth. May this book help prepare you for such a time as this.”

—**John Barber**, Pastor, Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

“With this volume Frame offers his many devoted readers a ‘triperspectival’ take on the history of Western philosophy and modern theology. Based on a course that he has been teaching at Reformed Theological Seminary for many years (the text is keyed to lectures available at [itunes.rts.edu](https://itunes.rts.edu)), and a lifetime of reading and thinking, this volume is the next fat Frame book by P&R Publishing. Although his interpretations of the many thinkers covered in this survey admittedly follow popular conventions, his assessment is distinctly his own. Frame’s devotion to Van Til, the dedicatee, is evident throughout as he reads this history as the story of the antithesis between Christian thought and all other belief systems. Here, Western thought becomes a narrative of errors, deviations, and idolatry and its study an exercise in preparing oneself for spiritual warfare in the life of the mind. *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* rounds out Frame’s corpus and is required reading for anyone interested in the contours of his thought.”

—**Bruce P. Baugus**, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson

“We now have an answer to the question of what would happen if John Frame became something of a Frederick Copleston and did a whole ‘history of philosophy.’ It is now possible to know, because it has been done. It would combine all the qualities that actually exist in Dr. Frame. It would be a fascinating combination of an irenic but prudent interaction with the whole gallery of thinkers through the ages, and would at the same time be an exercise in the casting out of the demons of humanistic autonomy, self-reference, and self-determination. I have felt since my student days when Dr. Frame was one of my professors that if I could choose anybody to evaluate anything in the intellectual realm (beginning with my own efforts as a student), it would be Dr. Frame. He was the best evaluator I ever sat under. That same quality has now been applied to the whole history of philosophy. Dr. Frame is gentler than Van Til, but (interestingly) just as incisive, with more of an eye for the finer contours and details than the old master himself.”

—**Richard Bledsoe**, Metropolitan Missionary, Boulder, Colorado; former PCA pastor

“‘If only!’ If only I had had this volume from John Frame when I studied philosophy at Vanderbilt as an undergraduate in the late 1960s! That was a time when it seemed that every college student was ‘into’ philosophy, but most philosophy either was dark and cynical (existentialism) or seemed to ignore the serious evils of those days by seeking to explain

everything through clearer language (logical positivism). Frame knows and explains well all the various strands of philosophy, and he puts the world and the history of philosophy in its proper perspective as seen through the lens of the Scriptures, God's truth about the world and about us. I was not privileged to have Dr. Frame's help when I first studied philosophy, but you do have that counsel available to you. Use it."

—**Robert C. Cannada Jr.**, Chancellor Emeritus, Reformed  
Theological Seminary

"When I was a young man, I plowed through Bertrand Russell's 1945 classic, *A History of Western Philosophy*. A couple of years ago I read the much shorter (and more interesting) work of Luc Ferry, *A Brief History of Thought*. Between these two I have become familiar with many histories of Western thought, each written out of deep commitments, some acknowledged, some not. But I have never read a history of Western thought quite like John Frame's. Professor Frame unabashedly tries to think through sources and movements out of the framework (bad pun intended) of deep-seated Christian commitments and invites his readers to do the same. These commitments, combined with the format of a seminary or college textbook, will make this work invaluable to students and pastors who tire of ostensible neutrality that is no more neutral than the next volume. Agree or disagree with some of his arguments, but John Frame will teach you how to *think* in theological and philosophical categories."

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

"For this work of great scope, John Frame begins with the simple foundation of a disciple. Eschewing vain promises of value-free consideration of Western thought regarding philosophy, theories of knowledge, and ethics, he freely confesses the Christian necessity of weighing the divine *ought* behind all human thought and endeavor. As waters run in a furrow, so the mind of the Christian necessarily considers theory, assertion, and imperative in accord with the lines plowed by the Word of God. Frame knows that such presuppositions will marginalize his analysis for secularists blind to their own biases, but he submits thought and praxis to his Master in order to give masterful consideration to the thought and ethics of those who have contributed (both for good and for ill) to our culture's perspectives and priorities."

—**Bryan Chapell**, Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church,  
Peoria, Illinois

“As a younger theologian I benefited enormously from John Frame’s outline, an extensive syllabus on the history of philosophy. He managed in a succinct, yet most competent manner to summarize the most significant moments in this history and to evaluate them theologically, that is, biblically. Here, in *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, Frame puts flesh on the bones of his earlier outline. And what a treasure it is! Among other virtues, he puts into question the supposed opposition between philosophy and theology, believing as he does that applying biblical theology to the issues raised by philosophers is an authentic and authoritative answer to those questions. For those who view philosophy as an alien world, this volume will challenge their concerns. For those who are already committed to the proper interface between theology and philosophy, these pages will confirm and deepen their construal.”

—**William Edgar**, Professor of Apologetics and John Boyer Chair of Evangelism and Culture, Westminster Theological Seminary

“The Bible as God’s self-attesting Word provides the foundations indispensable both for doing sound philosophy and for determining the proper relationship between philosophy and theology. Works written with this crucial conviction are few and far between. This volume is a major and welcome exception. Bringing together the author’s extensive thinking, past and present, in these areas, it is a valuable resource, especially for those concerned to follow the apostolic commitment to destroy arguments and everything lofty raised against the knowledge of God, and to bring every thought captive in obedience to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).”

—**Richard B. Gaffin Jr.**, Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Emeritus, Westminster Theological Seminary

“I come from a tradition that says about philosophy, ‘Handle with care!’ That is exactly what John Frame does in this important book, which connects in an exemplary manner the history of philosophy with biblical studies and Christian theology. To read this book with care is an education in itself.”

—**Timothy George**, Founding Dean, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University; General Editor, Reformation Commentary on Scripture

“Professor Frame has done the church a great service in producing this history of philosophy and theology—two disciplines that continually interact and react with each other. He has done so with his usual clarity of thought and commitment to absolute truth. His summaries are concise but coherent, and he is unafraid to demonstrate the inherent

contradictions that lie behind many modern constructs. This will be an indispensable guide for students and an invaluable tool for apologists.”

—**Liam Goligher**, Senior Minister, Tenth Presbyterian Church,  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

“John Frame’s *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* is a delightful gift to the church and the academy. I have shelves full of books on philosophy and many more shelves of theology books. None, however, moves between these two disciplines with the facility, insight, and grace exhibited by Dr. Frame in this new work. His analysis of philosophers and their systems is always clear, conversational, and, most importantly, biblical. In spring 2015, I taught History of Philosophy and Apologetics to a very bright class of high school seniors at a nearby Christian school. I am so thankful to have had access to the digital review copy of this work because it has informed and enhanced my teaching at every point. Having experienced firsthand the utility of this work, I recommend it enthusiastically to seminarians, pastors, and teachers—or simply to anyone interested in the history of ideas in the West. The many teaching aids alone are worth the purchase price. This has become my favorite John Frame publication, and I look forward to highlighting and dog-earing my bound copy of this most interesting read!”

—**R. J. Gore Jr.**, Professor of Systematic Theology and  
Dean of the Seminary, Erskine Theological Seminary,  
Due West, South Carolina

“Everything that Frame writes about philosophy is worth careful consideration.”

—**Howard Griffith**, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology  
and Academic Dean, Reformed Theological Seminary,  
Washington, D.C.

“Since the mid-twentieth century, Christians interested in pursuing the history of philosophy have often turned to Catholic scholarship, such as Frederick Copleston’s multivolume *A History of Philosophy* and James Collins’s *History of Modern European Philosophy*. Therefore, it is a sincere pleasure to commend John Frame’s *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* as a much-needed Reformed treatment of this important academic discipline. Frame traces the history of Western philosophy, a daunting task in itself. In the process, however, he also relates to Christian theology the great philosophical systems from the Greeks to the present. Frame connects this study to his larger corpus by adapting his perspectivalism to yet another discipline. The result,

as we have come to expect from his previous scholarship, is another weighty volume.

“More than heft, however, Frame delivers clear, cogent, and coherent discussion. A prominent feature is how thoroughly Frame treats modern philosophy, which since the advent of Kant has exercised enormous influence on theology. Throughout the volume, Frame looks backward and forward. He makes connections, poses questions, and provides poignant illustrations, while acknowledging significant contributions of key figures. But he also faithfully demonstrates weaknesses in argument and contends that under the principle of human autonomy in its many forms, the Western philosophic mind has one great need—the gospel.”

—**W. Andrew Hoffecker**, Emeritus Professor of Church History,  
Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson

“John Frame has been one of the most insightful and rigorously honest philosopher-theologians of the last three decades. Not only is he prolific, but he has an uncanny ability to analyze the themes and the subtle nuances of Western philosophy and theology. Yet there is more. John has a pastoral sensibility. As one of his students over twenty-five years ago, I recall coming to class to find a single profound sentence on the blackboard: ‘Theology is life.’ John could never separate theology or philosophy from the realities of everyday life. His new textbook, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, is one of those rare books that will both stimulate your mind and warm your heart.”

—**Frank A. James III**, President and Professor of Historical  
Theology, Biblical Theological Seminary

“What a privilege John Frame gives his reader: to sit through a detailed and rich course on Western history and theology that only full-time graduate students usually get. Frame has done a wonderful job of giving a thoroughly Christian, Reformed, and masterful interpretation of all the major thinkers in Western history, from the Greeks to the present, within the covers of one book. For this *tour de force*, we are all in his debt.”

—**Peter Jones**, Executive Director, truthXchange; Scholar-in-  
Residence, Westminster Seminary in California

“*A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* is a sweeping survey of the great thinkers who have shaped philosophical inquiry from its beginnings to contemporary thought. John Frame’s mastery of this intellectual domain and his penetrating philosophical and theological

critique yield a comprehensive and accessible guide to philosophy for Christian-worldview investigation. This work should be in pastors' libraries and readily available for seminary students, theologians, and philosophers who interact with the relationship between philosophy and Christian thought."

—**Peter A. Lillback**, President, Westminster Theological Seminary

"John Frame has done it again! He has written another superb and comprehensive book that will be of great and lasting value to the church. Seminaries and theological colleges in the West will want to require entering students to read this book before they matriculate. And graduates of those institutions will keep it close at hand for future reference. Thank you, Professor Frame!"

—**Samuel Logan**, International Director, World Reformed Fellowship

"John Frame has done it again. This book is a gift to the church. Students of all ages now have a dependable and trustworthy resource for use in evaluating Western philosophy from a Christian point of view. The prevailing perspective of the secular classroom will be challenged as Frame's work becomes more widely circulated in this generation."

—**Rod Mays**, Executive Pastor, Mitchell Road Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina; former National Coordinator, Reformed University Fellowship

"This book brings back memories of my own entrée into philosophy via the tradition that John Frame epitomizes. I was blessed to hear much of this as his student. No wonder I have always presumed that doing philosophy was a necessary implication of Christian discipleship. In fact, to be human is to be philosophical. Understanding things philosophically makes our engagement of everything better—humanness, creation, and culture, Christian theologizing included. It is to take seriously, and respond responsibly in, the world of ever-consequential ideas. This well-conceived book helps us to understand John Frame philosophically, as well as tantalizing many, I hope, to launch out into the philosophers themselves. Wonder calls us; wonder, in wisdom, awaits. And the love of wisdom proves to be the love of God. In this world of which he is Lord, we should expect to find truth everywhere. And wherever we find it, we may count that truth God's (something that I also learned from John Frame)."

—**Esther Lightcap Meek**, Professor of Philosophy, Geneva College, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania

“The sheer magnitude, scope, and erudition of this volume are breathtaking. Virtually all aspects of Christian and secular philosophy and theology from the classical Greek period to the present are outlined in painstaking detail with lavish documentation. There can be no doubt that Professor Frame’s insightful analysis of the human condition and his survey of historical attempts to resolve it will command attention both as a thesaurus of information and as a practical guide on how to live life in light of the revelation of God through his written Word.”

—**Eugene H. Merrill**, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary

“Western civilization is passing through a remarkable time that may be remembered by future historians as a milepost in the ragged journey to a place that we have never been before. Christians, as well as reflective observers of all traditions and faiths, will need a faithful guide to help make sense of the philosophical movements that carried them along. Dr. John Frame is eminently qualified to be that guide. The noted theologian is also a first-class philosopher and student of philosophy. I am therefore most thankful to learn of the new book by Dr. Frame and P&R Publishing: *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*. I commend this new work to the church—and beyond—as not merely a good book to read, but a trusted text to study and a stalwart sword to wield in the present crucial contest for the minds of men.”

—**Michael A. Milton**, President, Faith for Living, Inc.; Chancellor Emeritus, Reformed Theological Seminary

“With over forty-five years of study in theology, apologetics, and philosophy, Frame gives the reader a well-rounded work on philosophy from a Christian and decisively Reformed perspective. This textbook on philosophy defends the Christian faith. The teacher of philosophy/theology will find the work—including its study questions, extensive bibliographies, lists of free audio lectures, and links to great quotes—invaluable. The student of Scripture and philosophy will find the work detailed and encouraging, and will be better able to defend and live out the Christian faith after partaking of and digesting Frame’s extensive work. Frame gives an excellent overview of philosophers and their thought from the beginning to the present. In addition, he takes large philosophical ideas and simplifies them even for the average reader of philosophy. He does so in a clear, unambiguous writing style that is a pleasure to read. Overall, the book provides a wealth of knowledge, without ever becoming bogged down by lifeless descriptions or irrelevant information.”

—**Joseph R. Nally**, Theological Editor, Third Millennium Ministries

“John Frame has done it again! This book is the very best of two worlds in two ways: great history of philosophy as that is informed by great theology; great history of theology as that is informed by great philosophy. This book is pedagogically creative, too. What more could a believer ask for? If you read it, you will learn a lot and become a lot. How many fantastic works are in this man?”

—**David Naugle**, Distinguished University Professor and Chair and Professor of Philosophy, Dallas Baptist University

“If attacks on Christians in America increase, so will what John Frame calls ‘the attempt to make Christianity intellectually respectable.’ He’s right that this ignores our sinful repression of the truth and our need to receive from God new hearts and minds—and he shows in this book how philosophies that exalt either autonomous rationality or existential irrationality have taken a wrong turn. Philosophy majors and graduate students, most seminary students as well, and millions overly impressed by Platonists and Barthians need this book.”

—**Marvin Olasky**, Editor in Chief, *WORLD* magazine

“John Frame has done it again! In the lucid and comprehensive style of his *Theology of Lordship* volumes, he here presents a full overview of Western thought about knowledge of God as it must appear to all who receive Holy Scripture, as he does, as the record, product, and present reality of God speaking. And the solid brilliance of the narrative makes it a most effective advocacy for the Kuyper–Van Til perspective that in a well-digested form it represents. It is a further outstanding achievement by John Frame. The book deserves wide use as a textbook, and I hope it will achieve that. My admiration for John’s work grows and grows.”

—**J. I. Packer**, Board of Governors’ Professor of Theology, Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia

“The apostle Paul told Timothy to stir up the gift that was in him. Professor John Frame has devoted a lifetime to stirring up his complementary gifts of penetrating Western philosophy, uncovering its religious dimensions, and bridging the gap between expert and layman, to produce in *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* a volume practical for engaging in spiritual warfare.”

—**Andrée Seu Peterson**, Senior Writer, *WORLD* magazine

“Few in our day champion a vision of God that is as massive, magnificent, and biblical as John Frame’s. For decades, he has given himself to the church, to his students, and to meticulous thinking and the rigorous study of the Bible. He has winsomely, patiently, and persuasively

contended for the gospel in the secular philosophical arena, as well as in the thick of the church worship wars and wrestlings with feminism and open theism. He brings together a rare blend of big-picture thinking, levelheaded reflection, biblical fidelity, a love for the gospel and the church, and the ability to write with care and clarity.”

—**John Piper**, Founder and Teacher, [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org); Chancellor, Bethlehem College and Seminary

“This is the most important book ever written on the major figures and movements in philosophy. We have needed a sound guide, and this is it. Philosophy has many ideas and systems that are attractive but poisonous. Over the centuries people have fallen victim again and again. Frame sorts out the good and the bad with clarity and skill, using the plumb line of Scripture. Along the way he also provides a devastating critique of liberal theologies, showing that at bottom they are philosophies of human autonomy masquerading as forms of Christianity.”

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

“Everyone familiar with the work of John Frame expects his books to challenge long-standing assumptions and to move discussions forward in creative ways. This book will not disappoint. John displays his expertise as a philosopher and his devotion to Scripture as the standard by which all philosophies should be evaluated. He points toward old paths that are sure and opens new ways to pursue the relevance of philosophical discussions for scholars, students, and motivated laypeople alike.”

—**Richard L. Pratt Jr.**, President, Third Millennium Ministries

“John Frame begins his study of Western philosophy and theology with a quotation about the ‘fear of the LORD’ from the biblical book of Proverbs. Few intellectual historians operating today better embody such a biblically sagacious stance toward the philosophical and theological output of the Western world. In this work, Frame has bestowed a rich resource on his audience in the form of a sustained, thoughtful, and faithful witness to the development of the great ideas that populate so much discourse in the West and, for that matter, around the world. What is more compelling, however, is that Frame does not feign objectivity, like so many others, but engages his subjects from a Christian perspective, weighing each according to the teaching of Scripture.”

—**John Scott Redd Jr.**, President and Associate Professor of Old Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.

“For many Christians, philosophy connotes little more than the exercise of autonomous speculation. Viewed in only negative terms, the whole philosophic enterprise stands to be summarily dismissed. Although far more able than most to identify and engage the non-Christian assumptions governing so much of Western philosophy, Professor Frame is neither dismissive nor unappreciative. On the contrary, Frame winsomely engages the major philosophers of the Western tradition and the fundamental questions they raise. He exhibits deep familiarity with the history of philosophy, critical awareness of trends impacting theological development, and humble submission to the Word of God, thereby modeling the way in which a deep commitment to ‘thinking God’s thoughts after him’ is beneficial for maintaining and advocating for the gospel today. For many students (and not a few teachers), Frame’s *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* will serve as a reliable map of the unexplored terrain of metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and liberal theology. For others, it will serve as a walking staff, enabling the Christian man or woman to reenter philosophical discussion, maintain balance, and even prevail against hazardous forms of unbelief. I am glad for this volume and look forward to pointing theological students and others who lack philosophical grounding toward it.”

—**Mark P. Ryan**, Adjunct Professor of Religion and Culture,  
Covenant Theological Seminary; Director, Francis A. Schaeffer  
Institute

“If Frame’s Lordship Series is his magnum opus, the present work may be his crowning achievement. It’s a remarkably extensive survey for a single volume, and Frame’s knowledge of philosophers and philosophical schools is wide, deep, nimble, and analytical. More importantly, his impregnable grounding in the Christian (biblical!) worldview ensures that he offers from that distinctively Christian perspective a full, penetrating analysis and criticism of every major philosopher in the Western tradition. This, in fact, has never been done before, though many fine Christian books assessing philosophy have been written. What Frame has done here is to evaluate the entire basic canon of Western philosophy from a rigorously biblical viewpoint. That is simply unprecedented.”

—**P. Andrew Sandlin**, President, Center for Cultural Leadership,  
Coulterville, California

“Not only does the nominal Christian of our modern era seek to avoid philosophical and theological writings, but to a great extent this world seeks to rebuff all analytic thought from a Christian perspective. The world is filled with so-called scholars who have no knowledge of the importance of philosophy and theology in the development of Christian-

ity and in the context of our modern society. This simply should not be the case for biblical Christians who desire to bring all things under the crown rights of King Jesus. In order for Christians to rightfully understand the origin and development of civilization, a study of both philosophy and theology in their historical context ought to be fundamental, especially for those who want to become productive advocates for Christ's kingdom. In this present volume, Dr. Frame completes a solid analysis of the development of Western thought from a distinctly Christian perspective and ascertains its impact on man. His purpose is to expose the fact that what man is facing is nothing less than spiritual warfare in the life of Western society. If Christianity is to bring all things captive to the cause of Christ, then a very good place for every pastor, scholar, and Christian to begin is with the study of this book!"

—**Kenneth Talbot**, President, Whitefield College and Theological Seminary

"Many Christians today mistakenly think of philosophy as an esoteric endeavor irrelevant to Christian theology and discipleship. But Colossians 2:8, among other verses, indicates that we must learn to discern the ways in which human philosophies can be deceitfully empty and captivating. Furthermore, it implies that there is such a thing as 'philosophy . . . according to Christ.' In this fascinating survey, John Frame walks us through the history of philosophy to show the varied ways in which both secular philosophies and deficient Christian attempts at philosophy exhibit signs of both irrationalism and rationalism. The result is not only a historical overview of the key players and their philosophies, but also a model for how to integrate philosophy and theology in a way that honors the Lord by taking every thought captive so that we can obey Christ and submit to his lordship (2 Cor. 10:5). Highly recommended!"

—**Justin Taylor**, Senior Vice President and Publisher for Books, Crossway

"Getting the relationship between theology and philosophy right is vital if we are going to do either well. John Frame's *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* offers tremendous help in getting it right. We never think in a historical vacuum but are profoundly shaped by our context and predecessors. This book helps us to locate ourselves historically so that we can be more aware of our blind spots and tendencies to err. The interpretation of history is explicitly evangelical, which I find refreshingly honest and helpful. Frame wonderfully shows that thinking Christianly makes profound sense. Once again, this intellectual sage has done a great service to the church and academy in

bringing greater clarity to our understanding of the most important questions of life.”

—**Erik Thoennes**, Professor of Theology and Chair, Undergraduate Theology, Biola University/Talbot School of Theology;  
Pastor, Grace Evangelical Free Church, La Mirada, California

“Drawing both on his background in philosophy and theology and on his forty-five years of reading, thinking, and teaching, Professor Frame has provided a history of Western philosophy and theology as stimulating as it is informative. His summary of the thought of substantial thinkers in both disciplines over the course of the past millennia (with the exception of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox thinkers) is a wonderful gift to the church. His tome will be a particular blessing to would-be historians, philosophers, theologians, and apologists of the Christian faith. They are the ones searching for a point of entrance into the connected fields of philosophy and theology, and needing a biblically reliable and insightful analysis of the related disciplines. Their wait is over. Here they have the indispensable mapping to aid them as they start or make sense of the journey.

“Defining *philosophy* as ‘the disciplined attempt to articulate and defend a worldview [aka *metanarrative*],’ and arguing on the basis of the one found in Scripture, the philosophical credentials of theology (‘the application of the Word of God, by persons, to every aspect of human life’), Professor Frame posits the view that the two disciplines are distinctive, yet ‘profoundly interdependent.’ But instead of following the notion, originating with Philo the Jew, that philosophy is the handmaid of theology, he offers a biblical view of philosophy—one in which inscripturated revelation is foundational as both the substance and the assessment of true philosophy. On this understanding, Scripture needs no helping hand from philosophy, for the former governs the latter when rightly pursued.

“Supporting this view are the known distinctives of Professor Frame’s theological method: the supremacy of God’s lordship, the consistent application of his ‘something close to biblicism,’ presuppositionalism, and triperspectivalism (as seen in three subdivisions of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory). The application of these distinctives to the history of Western philosophy and theology renders Professor Frame both an attractive narrator and a clearheaded challenger of man’s claim to his ‘autonomous’ conceptualization of the world.

“Add to all this the user-friendly study questions, glossaries, and bibliographies, and the more novel list of online sources and links to famous quotes, and we have at hand a tome that many of us will undoubtedly wish had been available when we set out in earnest on our

own studies. May God bless it not only to the individual inquirer after truth, but to fulfill Professor Frame's expressed aspiration—a new level of respect for evangelical Christianity, for the Bible, and for Christ!”

—**Tim J. R. Trumper**, Senior Minister, Seventh Reformed Church,  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

“This is an excellent primer that surveys the history of Christian thought from a thoroughgoing Christian and Van Tillian perspective—the fruit of many years of pedagogical experience. Of particular value are the spiritual conflicts that Frame identifies in every era and domain of Western worldview thinking, from the ancient Greeks to the present postmoderns. Those who read and digest Frame's work will grow in wisdom and, by God's grace, will avoid the doom of repeating earlier mistakes.”

—**Kevin J. Vanhoozer**, Research Professor of Systematic Theology,  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“How's your thought-life? Yes, Scripture is concerned about impure thoughts, but what about the manner of our thinking? What about the gulch of deceitful thinking? Scripture warns against deception, especially self-deception. This is particularly Paul's burden for the Colossians and the Laodiceans, believers who had been 'taken captive' through philosophy rooted not in the divine-preeminent Creator Christ, but in some aspect of creation, whether that be man's mind, his tradition, humanly plausible but deluding arguments, or some materialist or Gnostic pagan construct. And this captivity spawns real-world consequences: robbing Christians of encouragement, love, assurance, understanding, and knowing 'real reality.' How can we combat this sort of deceitful intellectual enemy who cunningly does not use guns and bazookas? By putting intellectual boots on the ground. But as any seasoned military officer knows, one cannot put boots on the ground in a hot zone without first knowing and understanding the ground. John Frame has again brilliantly served the body of Christ by providing a fresh, cogent, robust, informed, lucid, accessible, panoramic, practical, sound, faithful, doxological, honest, and historical treatment of philosophy and theology—good, bad, and sometimes ugly—all aimed at joining and supporting Paul's struggle for those whom he has perhaps not seen face to face, but whom he longs to see more firmly rooted in Christ. This volume is already indispensable, and will be increasingly so as postmodern fads infect and delude the church. Note carefully, however: this is not a work for professional theologians, though they would certainly benefit from it; nor is it a work for just ecclesiastical 'spiritual work,' though it will benefit all facets of 'church life.' This is a

work for all Christians living in God's world, who are saved from something for something. This volume shows them how to think faithfully in God's redeemed world, so that they will in fact take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ—and that's not a suggestion; it's a command. This work wonderfully facilitates following Christ, who is to be preeminent in all things, including our thought-life."

—**Jeffery J. Ventrella**, Senior Counsel and Senior Vice President,  
Alliance Defending Freedom

"Christian apologist Cornelius Van Til pioneered the strategy of discerning a 'rationalist/irrationalist dialectic' in the various secular alternatives to the Christian faith, but he never wrote a comprehensive history of philosophy that sought to prove the point. John Frame now has. In this volume the evangelical world finally has a contemporary history of philosophy that is explicitly written from a Christian perspective, that is exceptional in its clarity and organization, and that *gets the details right*. I first encountered Frame's massive philosophy outlines as his graduate student back in the early 1990s, and I always wondered when such obvious labors of love would find the wider audience that they richly deserve. While it is impossible to provide in one volume (even one of this size!) a thorough exposition and assessment of every major thinker in intellectual history, Frame's detailed summaries and trenchant analyses constantly inspire the imagination to consider further what would be a genuinely Christian *alternative* to the thinker under discussion. Readers will surely need to continue for themselves the hard work that Frame has begun—the hard work of actually arguing out that Christian alternative. But often the very planting of seeds—seeds of doubt about idolatry, seeds of faith in the triune Creator, providential Sustainer, and Redeemer—is what is needed to get that process going for disciplined, attentive, and thoughtful Christian readers, and Frame plants such seeds again and again. I pray that his philosophic magnum opus finds a wide audience among college and seminary students, who are desperately in need of these accurate summaries that neither distort primary sources nor shrink back from articulating essential contrasts between influential philosophers and central biblical ideas."

—**Greg Welty**, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Program  
Coordinator, M.A. Philosophy of Religion, Southeastern Baptist  
Theological Seminary

"John Frame's *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* should become an indispensable resource for Christian scholars, pastors, campus ministers, and lay leaders. There are volumes on theology and philosophy, but a volume that deals clearly and forthrightly with

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—**Luder G. Whitlock Jr.**, President Emeritus, Reformed  
Theological Seminary, Orlando

A HISTORY OF  
WESTERN PHILOSOPHY  
AND THEOLOGY



A HISTORY OF  
WESTERN PHILOSOPHY  
AND THEOLOGY

John M. Frame

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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## FOREWORD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. See *ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

R. Albert Mohler Jr.

President

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

## PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. As in the fascinating booklet “Why I Believe in God,” available at [http://www.thehighway.com/why\\_I\\_believe\\_cvt.html](http://www.thehighway.com/why_I_believe_cvt.html).

## PREFACE

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

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

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

5. All URLs were rechecked May 29, 2015.

## ABBREVIATIONS

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

## ABBREVIATIONS

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

# **A History of Western Philosophy and Theology**

Spiritual Warfare in the Life of the Mind



# I

## PHILOSOPHY AND THE BIBLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

## OUTLINE

**Why Study  
Philosophy?****Philosophy,  
Theology, and  
Religion****Subdivisions of  
Philosophy**

- Metaphysics
- Epistemology
- Value Theory

**Relations of the  
Three Subdivisions****Biblical Philosophy**

- Creator and  
Creature
- Absolute  
Tripersonality
- Lordship

**Perspectives of  
Human Knowledge****Sin and Philosophy****Christian and  
Non-Christian  
Philosophy****The Antithesis in  
Metaphysics**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### WHY STUDY PHILOSOPHY?

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

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

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

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

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

5. Plato, *Apology*, 38a.

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

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Metaphysics**

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

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

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

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

**PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY, AND RELIGION**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I do not follow theologians such as Barth and Bonhoeffer, and many preachers, who use *religion* to refer to self-righteousness, man’s attempt to justify himself before God by his works. Dictionaries never define it that way. More commonly, dictionaries equate the term with *faith*, *belief*, or *creed*, as does the definition of Clouser, to be discussed later in this chapter. But my definition catches, I think, the nuance of James 1:26–27—not faith as such, but its outworking in godly speech and compassionate behavior. *Religion* is a perfectly good word, and there is no justification for redefining it in order to make a theological or rhetorical<sup>9</sup> point.

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

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

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

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

## OUTLINE

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Philosophy

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Metaphysics

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

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

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

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

“Divine” means having the status of not depending on anything else.<sup>14</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

14. *Ibid.*, 21–22.

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

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

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

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

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

16. Clouser, *Myth*, 25.

17. *Ibid.*, 26–27.

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

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

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*In a truly free society,  
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whether called reli-  
gious or not, and the  
marketplace of ideas  
would be free to sort  
them out.*

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

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

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

## SUBDIVISIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

*Metaphysics*

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

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

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

Metaphysics includes the question “why is there something rather

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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### **Epistemology**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Value Theory

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

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

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

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

### RELATIONS OF THE THREE SUBDIVISIONS

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

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

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

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

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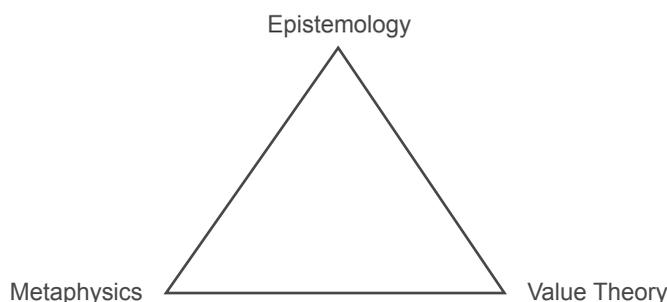
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things. To the early Wittgenstein, knowledge is a knowledge of facts expressed in propositions, and as he said, “The world is the totality of facts, not of things.”<sup>20</sup> So for him as well, epistemology and metaphysics determine one another.

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

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



**Fig. 1.1. Perspectives on the Discipline of Philosophy**

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

**BIBLICAL PHILOSOPHY**

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

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

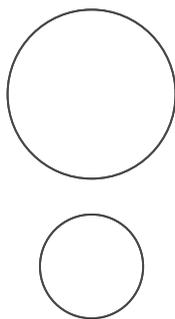
21. Readers familiar with my previous books know that I use quite a number of triangular perspectival diagrams. Usually they form a pattern derived from God’s lordship attributes, which we will consider later in the chapter. The present diagram does not align easily with the lordship pattern, but in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

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

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

### ***Creator and Creature***

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



**Fig. 1.2. The Distinction between Creator and Creature**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Absolute Tripersonality***<sup>25</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*The biblical God also has the attributes of personality. He is not only absolute, but personal: he knows, loves, speaks. So not only is he the fundamental cause of everything, but our relationship with him is the most important of all our personal relationships.*

*Only biblical religion acknowledges an absolute being who is also personal. . . . More than this: the biblical God is not only personal, but tripersonal.*

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

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

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

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

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

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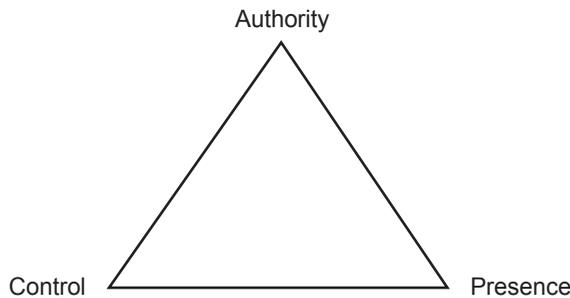
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also important. As we saw earlier, philosophical metaphysicians have argued among themselves about monism and pluralism: whether the universe is one or many. Van Til’s view was that because God is both one and many, he has made a world that is both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

**Lordship**

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

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



**Fig. 1.3. The Lordship Attributes**

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

*What, then, is the relationship between Creator and creature, between the absolute tripersonality and those who depend on him? I believe that the most fundamental biblical description of this relationship is lordship: God is Lord, and creation is his servant.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## PERSPECTIVES OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

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

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

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

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

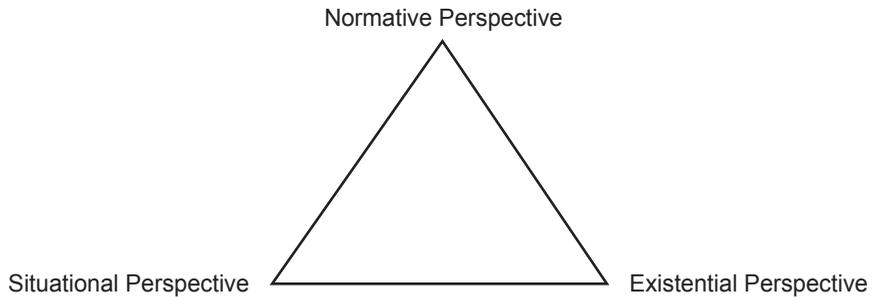
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providence.<sup>34</sup> As we explore that situation (both our individual situations and the whole course of nature and history), we are seeking to know the world by the *situational perspective*.

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

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



**Fig. 1.4. Perspectives on Human Knowledge**

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

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

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

*A Christian philosopher should understand that we cannot have a philosophy based on fact (situational) unless those facts are interpreted by God’s norms (normative) and through the faculties of our minds (existential).*

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

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

## SIN AND PHILOSOPHY

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

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

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

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

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

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*In the unbelieving  
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only to his own law.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### CHRISTIAN AND NON-CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

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

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

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*Antithesis does not mean that Christians and non-Christians disagree on every proposition. . . . But the intellectual activities of each must be seen in the context of their life purpose.*

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

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

When the believer, the unbeliever, or both are inconsistent with their general life-direction, they can agree. But such agreements may be short-lived. In any case, both agreements and disagreements are part of the larger context of spiritual warfare, the battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Sometimes even Satan serves his purposes by speaking truth, as when he quotes Scripture in Matthew 4:6.<sup>35</sup>

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

## THE ANTITHESIS IN METAPHYSICS

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

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

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

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

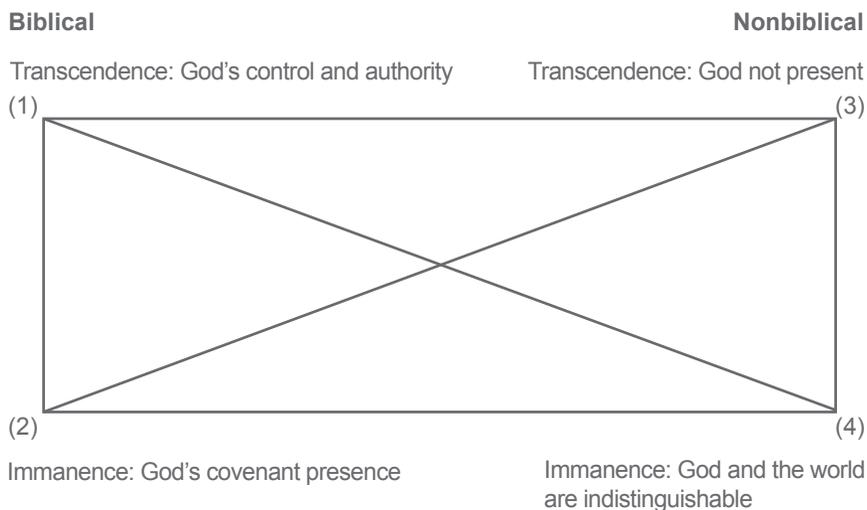
*Transcendence* evokes the biblical picture of God as “high,” “lifted up,” “exalted,” and so on (Pss. 7:7; 9:2; Isa. 6:1). *Immanence* draws on biblical language about God’s being “near” and “with us” (Gen. 21:22; 26:3, 24, 28; 28:15; Deut. 4:7; Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23).

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

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

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

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



**Fig. 1.5. Concepts of Transcendence and Immanence**

*I think it is better to use the term [immanence] with more covenant nuance. God is omnipresent, yes, but with personal intentions toward people, either blessing or judgment. God’s immanence is his covenant presence.*

*What we must strenuously avoid is what some theologians do: to say that God becomes so “near” that he cannot be distinguished from the world, and that he therefore abandons his divine nature.*

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

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

The left side of the rectangle<sup>37</sup> represents the biblical views of transcendence and immanence that we have discussed. (1) is biblical transcendence: God's rule. Included in God's rule are his lordship attributes of control and authority. (2) is biblical immanence: God's covenant presence. The right side of the rectangle represents the nonbiblical views that we have noted. (3) is nonbiblical transcendence: that God is so far "above" us that we cannot know him or identify him in history. As Barth would say, he is wholly hidden or wholly other. (4) is nonbiblical immanence: that the immanence of God is in effect the autonomy of creatures, God as wholly revealed. On this view, man in effect becomes God, or God is reduced to the level of man.

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

The vertical lines draw our attention to the relative consistency of the two approaches. The biblical view is consistent and without tension.<sup>38</sup> The nonbiblical view is full of tension: How can God be both ineffable and identical with the world, as in Gnosticism? How can he be wholly hidden and wholly revealed, as in Barth? But although this system is contradictory, we can understand how this view of transcendence *generates* this particular view of immanence, and vice versa. If God is the nameless beyond, then necessarily we are left as masters of our own destiny. For, practically speaking, he cannot rule us. We cannot take account of him in our values, our decisions, or our worldviews. Still, we cannot live without ultimate values, so we become god ourselves. The universe cannot exist without ultimate powers of causation, so it becomes its own cause. Removing God from the world enables human autonomy. And conversely, if our goal is to be autonomous,<sup>39</sup> then we either must deny God's existence altogether<sup>40</sup> or must convince ourselves that God is too far beyond us to have any practical influence in our lives. So (3) and (4) require each other in a sense, even though bringing them together creates tension and paradox.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*To have a comprehensive explanation of everything is to have a kind of knowledge available only to God himself. That is impossible for human beings.*

*The world is both one and many, because God, who is one and many, has made the world in such a way that it reflects him.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Particulars are collections of generalities, and generalities are collections of things. Universals and particulars define one another.*

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

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

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

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

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

## THE ANTITHESIS IN EPISTEMOLOGY

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

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

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

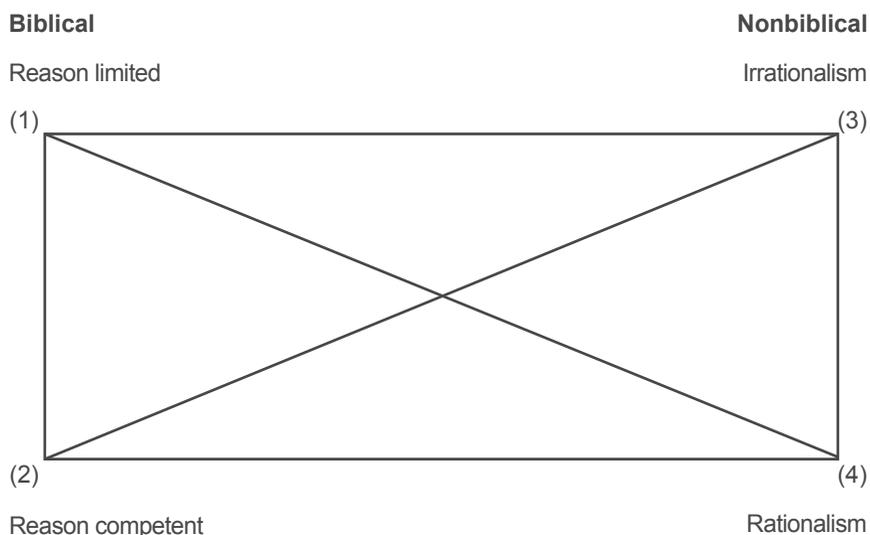
It is the *presence* of God, however (existential), that makes human knowledge actual. For part of the biblical meaning of God’s presence is

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

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

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

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



**Fig. 1.6. Concepts of Rationalism and Irrationalism**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## THE ANTITHESIS IN VALUES

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

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

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

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

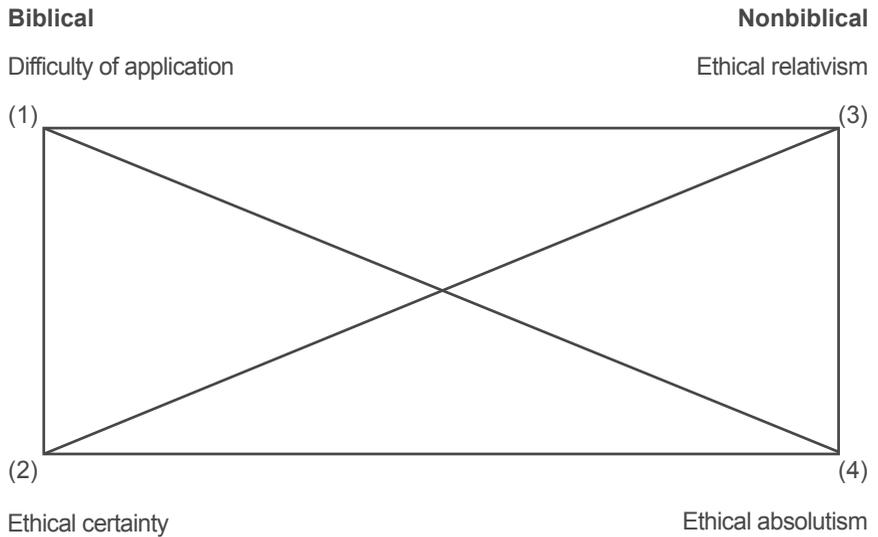
45. *AJCB*, 95–123; John M. Frame and Paul Kurtz, “Do We Need God to Be Moral?” *Free Inquiry* 16, 2 (1996). Courtesy of the Council for Secular Humanism, <http://www.secularhumanism.org>. Also available at [http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame\\_articles/1996Debate.htm](http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/1996Debate.htm).

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

The Christian finds ethical certainty in God’s revelation. But he often runs into difficulty trying to apply that revelation to the issues of life. He accepts that he doesn’t have all the answers, and bows the knee to God’s mystery. So in the area of values, the rectangle looks like this; see fig. 1.7.<sup>46</sup>



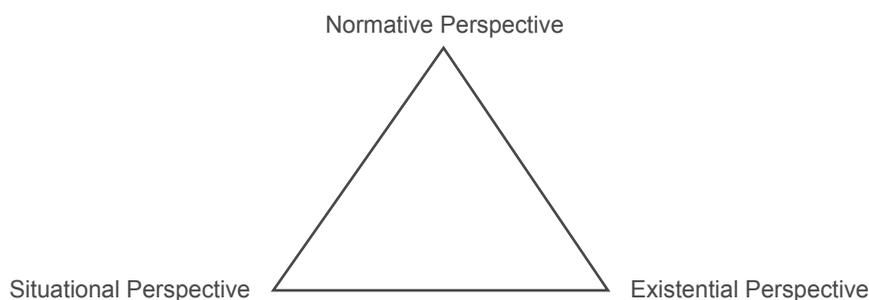
**Fig. 1.7. Ethical Relativism and Absolutism**

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

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

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

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



**Fig. 1.8. Perspectives on Ethics**

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

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

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

*There are three general types of secular ethics: deontologism, teleologism, and existentialism. These correspond, more or less, to the three perspectives of Christian thought: deontological to the normative, teleological to the situational, and existentialist to the existential.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

KEY TERMS

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

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

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

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

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PHILOSOPHY TEXTS

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

#### *Histories of Philosophy: General*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Online**

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

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

**Readings in Philosophy: General**

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

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

### ***Christian Analyses of the History of Philosophy***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## OUTLINE

Why Study  
Philosophy?  
Philosophy,  
Theology, and  
Religion  
Subdivisions of  
Philosophy  
Metaphysics  
Epistemology  
Value Theory  
Relations of the  
Three Subdivisions  
Biblical Philosophy  
Perspectives of  
Human Knowledge  
Sin and Philosophy  
Christian and  
Non-Christian  
Philosophy  
The Antithesis in  
Metaphysics  
The Antithesis in  
Epistemology  
The Antithesis in  
Values

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

## READ FOR YOURSELF

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## LISTEN ONLINE

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

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Sin and Philosophy  
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Metaphysics  
The Antithesis in  
Epistemology  
The Antithesis in  
Values

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

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

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

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

## FAMOUS QUOTES

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

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

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