# 19

## PRESUPPOSITIONALISM AND FRAME'S EPISTEMOLOGY

JAMES N. ANDERSON

AS "LIGHT-BULB" MOMENTS GO, it was one of the more memorable in my life. I was standing in a Christian bookstore, perusing (as was my habit) the various items on the shelves labeled "Apologetics." One book suddenly caught my eye, not because of its cover design—eye-catching though it was—but because of its title: *Apologetics to the Glory of God*. Apologetics . . . *to the glory of God*? For several years I had taken a keen interest in Christian apologetics, devouring stacks of books on the subject. But until that moment I'd always thought of apologetics as having two purposes: first, to protect my personal faith against the hostile intellectual environment of a secular university, and second, to save me from looking like a credulous buffoon in the face of my unbelieving peers, in the hope that they might actually take the Christian faith seriously. Never before had I considered the idea that the overarching purpose of apologetics was to bring glory to almighty God. The very title of the book—never mind its contents, which I later digested with delight—had triggered a "Copernican Revolution" in my understanding not only of apologetics but of *every* intellectual pursuit. My modest hope is that this essay will serve as a fitting tribute to the author of that book, John M. Frame, who first roused me from my anthropocentric slumbers.

In what follows I will try to accomplish a number of things. First, I will describe the basic contours of Frame's epistemology, focusing on its two most distinctive elements: its emphasis on divine lordship and its triperspectival methodology. I will then explore the relevance of Frame's work to issues in "mainstream" analytical epistemology. Turning to matters of apologetics, I will discuss how Frame's epistemology undergirds his commitment to the Van Tillian school of presuppositionalism, before finally showing how Frame's triperspectivalism can be fruitfully applied in a presuppositional critique of one influential anti-Christian worldview.

## An Epistemology of Divine Lordship

The axis on which Frame's epistemology turns is undoubtedly the concept of divine lordship. One hardly need crack open the covers of *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* to detect this emphasis, since it is indicated both by the book's title (how many epistemology textbooks have the word *God* on their spines?) and by the name of the series of which *DKG* is the first volume: A Theology of Lordship. Significantly, what Frame presents to us is not so much a *theory* of knowledge as a *theology* of knowledge.[1]

One thus discovers immediately that Frame's epistemology isn't a theory of knowledge in the familiar sense. Traditional epistemology has focused on the concept of knowledge itself and a cluster of closely related concepts: belief, perception, justification, rationality, truth, and the like. Epistemologists typically ask questions such as: What do we mean when we speak about *knowledge*? What counts as knowledge? What is the structure of knowledge? What do we know, and what can we know? Do we in fact know anything at all? Questions such as these naturally arise for inquisitive human beings who take time to critically reflect on what they normally take for granted about themselves and the world they inhabit. The agenda for traditional epistemology is driven largely by human curiosity and self-reflection.

There's nothing intrinsically wrong with such an agenda, to be sure, but Frame's approach is self-consciously different. He approaches the topic of epistemology from the perspective of a Christian theologian already

---

1. "Though my book is, I trust, philosophically informed, it is probably more like theology than philosophy, as those terms are usually understood." *DKG*, 385. Indeed, *DKG* is not intended merely as a theological exposition, but "as a sermon." Ibid. Perhaps it would be more realistic to see *DKG* (over four hundred pages in length) as a sermon *series*!

committed to the ultimate authority and illuminating power of God's Word with respect to every aspect of human life, and thus his agenda is driven by this overarching question: What does God's Word teach us about our knowledge?[2] This is not to say that Frame is uninterested in the sorts of questions addressed by traditional epistemology, still less that he wants to evade them. On the contrary, *DKG* addresses many of these questions either directly or indirectly.[3] The point is simply this: Frame has his own priorities. *DKG* is an extended discussion of human knowledge for which the distinctive concerns and emphases of Scripture are to set the agenda.[4]

It isn't hard to see, viewed in this light, why the notion of divine lordship plays such a foundational and pervasive role in Frame's exposition. Beyond question, the primary subject matter of Scripture is *God*. And in Frame's studied judgment, the most prominent way in which Scripture presents God is as "the Lord."[5] It therefore follows that any discussion of human knowledge from a biblical perspective must be firmly tethered to a robust doctrine of divine lordship.

It comes as no surprise, then, to find the opening chapter of *DKG* laying the foundations with a discussion of the biblical concept of lordship. In the first place, lordship is a "covenantal concept."[6] God relates to human beings by way of covenants, and in every instance God is the covenant head.[7] God alone is the author, initiator, and governor of every divine-human covenant as to its participants, its conditions, and its consequences. God relates to us in this manner because he is at once absolutely sovereign and wholly gracious. At this point in the discussion, Frame spells out some implications for our understanding of *divine transcendence* and *divine immanence*.[8] The biblical notion of covenant lordship places certain constraints on our explication of

2. In contrasting *DKG* with the writings of the Reformed epistemologists (Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, William Alston, et al.), Frame declares, "I am expounding God's authoritative Word as I understand it to bear on epistemological questions." *DKG*, 384–85.

3. See, e.g., Frame's explanation of *DKG*'s structure and topics: ibid., 4–5.

4. This observation likely explains the dissatisfaction expressed by some Christian philosophers with Frame's writings on epistemology. The problem arises in part because of a failure to recognize that Frame's agenda doesn't coincide with theirs (although there is still considerable overlap, as we will see).

5. For the biblical arguments on this point, see *DKG*, 11–18, and at greater length, *DG*, 21–35.

6. *DKG*, 12.

7. Ibid., 13.

8. Ibid., 13–15.

these two doctrines, which if neglected inevitably lead to serious distortions in our knowledge of God—and thus in our knowledge of everything else.

The twin attributes of transcendence and immanence are staples of Christian theology, although they are less commonly placed in an explicitly covenantal context. The terms themselves, however, are the inventions (or rather adoptions) of theologians and bear no straightforward relation to the ways in which Scripture teaches, on the one hand, that the Creator is "over" and "beyond" his creation, and on the other, that the Creator is "with" and "in" his creation. These technical terms can therefore lead us astray if not firmly moored in the biblical picture of God. Recognizing this hazard—the casualties of which are strewn across the battlegrounds of twentieth-century theology—Frame has made an innovative contribution: to re-express these two traditional attributes as the triad of *control*, *authority*, and *presence*.

God's *control* is his creation and determination of all things other than God. Not only does the Lord possess the power to overcome any possible obstacle, he is also the initiator of every event in creation (not least his covenants) such that all things proceed according to his good and wise plans.[9] God's *authority* consists in his absolute rights over everything that is not God. In the simplest terms: what God says, goes. So the Lord rightly requires unqualified loyalty and obedience from his creatures, not merely to uphold his glory but also for their ultimate good.

Frame contends that the dual concepts of *control* and *authority* track the biblical vocabulary more closely than the classical notion of transcendence. Yet these two "lordship attributes" must be balanced with a third: God's *presence*, which consists in his nearness to the creation, his intimate involvement with his creatures, and, most of all, his person-to-person relationship with his people. Only in terms such as these—and not, say, the mutual dependence and influence posited by process theologians—does Scripture portray the Lord as "immanent."[10]

9. As the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it: "God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." WCF 3.1.

10. For further discussion of the lordship attributes, with close reference to scriptural texts, see *DG*, 36–115. (See also "Backgrounds to My Thought," in the present volume.) The story of modern theology is in large measure a tragedy premised on the failure to explicate and balance the doctrines of divine transcendence and divine immanence in ways that closely track God's self-revelation in Scripture. Perhaps some of the damage might have been avoided if an

This triad of lordship attributes is not only evident throughout Scripture, argues Frame, but also reflected in the very Trinitarian nature of God. God the Father is the one who, by his authority, sends the Son and the Spirit. God the Son is the one who, by his sovereign power, carries out the Father's authoritative will. God the Spirit is the one who, by his dwelling in and with God's people, manifests God's presence in the world.[11]

To know God, then, is to know him first and foremost as the *covenant Lord*, which in turn means recognizing his control, authority, and presence.[12] Yet this God is not merely the primary *object* of our knowledge; he is also the primary *context* of our knowledge. Only "in him" do we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). This living and moving must surely include the *epistemic* dimensions of human existence. Without God, human knowledge would be impossible in principle—a point to which we will return.

As one might expect, the biblical doctrine that God is the covenant Lord has numerous ramifications for the way we approach and answer epistemological questions. The main burden of *DKG* is to identify those ramifications and draw out their application to our manifold intellectual endeavors as God's creatures. Frame asks: What does it mean in practice to know God, ourselves, and the world, recognizing that we are *within God's control*, *under God's authority*, and *in God's presence*?

My purpose in this opening section has been to locate the beating heart of Frame's epistemology so as to set the stage for what I say later on. But one particularly significant implication cannot pass without comment at this point. This is the principle—given great emphasis by Frame's mentor, Cornelius Van Til—that human thought is not autonomous; that is to say, it is not a law unto itself. The ultimate norms for human knowledge are found not in any human mind or minds, or anywhere else in creation, but in the mind of God. As creatures made in the image of God, and subject to his

---

understanding of God's "immanence" had been drawn more closely from a Hebrew etymology (*Immanuel*: "God with us") than from a Latin one (*in manere*: "to remain or dwell in").

11. This is not to say that each person of the Trinity reflects only one of the lordship attributes—a claim that would be anti-Trinitarian to the core. Frame's point, rather, is that distinctive roles of the persons, as revealed in redemptive history, broadly correspond in emphasis with the lordship triad. See *DG*, 727–28. See also *PP*, http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/2008Primer.htm (accessed May 14, 2009); "Backgrounds to My Thought."

12. I have often been tempted to think of Frame's lordship attributes as God's *might* (control), God's *right* (authority), and God's *light* (presence—cf. Pss. 18:28; 36:9; 56:13; 89:15; 90:8; 118:27; Rev. 22:5). Neat though it may be, it probably runs the risk of sacrificing conceptual precision at the altar of aesthetics!

lordship, we are obligated to pattern our own thinking after God's thinking—insofar as he has revealed it to us. As Van Tillians are fond of putting it, we are designed "to think God's thoughts after him." Indeed, to attempt to think in any other manner is not only sinful, but insanely self-destructive.[13] We must therefore strive in every area of knowledge to observe and conform ourselves to God's revelation, both in nature and in Scripture.[14]

Put this way, it's hard to see why any Christian would find this principle objectionable. It is a straightforward consequence of the biblical presentation of the Creator-creature relationship. Yet it's remarkable how rarely the principle is acknowledged and applied when Christians reflect on the various intellectual disciplines in which they participate: whether science, politics, economics, philosophy, history, arts, sociology, or psychology, to name but a handful. It isn't merely *theologians* (in the "professional" sense) who must seek the counsel of God in his Word and submit all their thoughts to it. Indeed, it isn't merely *Christians* who must do so; to say otherwise would be to reduce Yahweh to a provincial deity rather than the Lord of all creation. The fact that so many believers assume that Scripture has precious little to teach us about science, politics, economics, and all the rest reveals that we have failed to reflect in any depth on what Scripture has to say about human knowledge *in general*. A careful reading of *DKG* would be a first stride toward remedying that neglect.

## A Triperspectival Epistemology

If an overarching emphasis on divine lordship is the primary distinctive of Frame's epistemology, a close second must be its "triperspectival" approach to analysis. According to Frame, a balanced study of human knowledge requires that we consider it from three distinct yet complementary perspectives: the *normative*, the *situational*, and the *existential*. In order to understand the rationale for this claim, however, it will be important to first say a word or two about perspectivalism in general.

Framean perspectivalism is characterized by two core claims: (1) at any one time, each of us has only a partial and limited perspective on any subject

13. Cf. Rom. 1:18–32; 1 Cor. 2:14–16; Eph. 4:17–19.
14. This raises the question—which cannot be treated here—whether our understanding of Scripture should take priority over our understanding of nature (and in what respects). For Frame's thoughts on this, see *DKG*, 137–38; *AGG*, 23.

matter; and (2) in order to best understand any subject matter, we need to consider it from multiple perspectives. The first claim follows from the simple observation that we are not God. We are finite and not omniscient, and therefore our apprehension of any object of knowledge is inevitably "limited to one perspective or another."[15] The second claim is a natural extension of the first: given our perspectival limitations, it follows that our understanding of any subject matter can be developed and enhanced by considering it from alternative perspectives. This can be accomplished in a number of ways: for example, by shifting our point of view, either physically or conceptually; by reordering or reorganizing our data; by considering different emphases or "entry points"; and by consulting with others and allowing their insights to complement our own.[16]

Perhaps the most helpful analogy here is the geometrical one. Given that we are stereo-optical creatures restricted to one point of view in time and space, we lack the capacity to see every part of a three-dimensional object at once, particularly if it is large and complex. For example, suppose I visit a house to assess it as a potential purchase. Clearly, it is not possible for me to view the front, back, and sides of the house simultaneously. I need to change my vantage point—my *perspective*—to gain a fuller understanding of the house. Likewise, I cannot see the entire house all at once in fine detail. I can first stand back and take a wide view, but then I need to step up close and scrutinize individual features. Exterior and interior views give me further perspectives and enhance my knowledge. I may also decide to visit the property again in different weather or lighting conditions. Finally, it will be prudent of me to invite other people to view the house, so that I can benefit from their additional perspectives.

Our spatiotemporal limitations are but one aspect of our finitude. Frame's basic point is that what goes for geometrical perspectives goes for other kinds of conceptual perspectives too. The geometrical analogy also makes it clear that the charge of relativism, occasionally leveled at Framean perspectivalism by its critics, is quite misguided. It doesn't follow, from the fact that a house appears differently to five people standing in various loca-

15. *PP.*
16. One example of the fruitfulness of multiple perspectives can be found in Edward de Bono's best seller, *Six Thinking Hats* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1985). This footnote seems as good a place as any to mention that in writing this essay I have benefited from the additional perspectives of Steve Hays, Paul Manata, Steve Scrivener, and John Frame, who were kind enough to send me critical comments on an earlier draft.

tions, that the house *as such* is different for each person or that there are no objective truths about the house. The critics thus conflate *relativism* and *relativity*; the former is self-defeating nonsense, whereas the latter ought to be self-evident common sense. In any case, Frame is careful to point out that the very *basis* for objectivity is the existence and self-revelation of an absolute God.[17] Since God's knowledge is comprehensive and determinative, it is *constitutive* of objectivity for humans. Our multiple, finite perspectives are like small windows onto God's unified, consistent, all-encompassing perspective on reality. This observation, we might say, is a further perspective on "thinking God's thoughts after him."[18] What's more, it suggests a distinctively Christian theistic alternative to the autonomous pretensions of both modernist epistemologies (which hold that pure objectivity is both attainable and desirable) and postmodernist epistemologies (which hold that no degree of objectivity is either attainable or desirable).

So much for perspectivalism as a general thesis. Frame, however, is convinced that many important perspectives occur in *triads*.[19] We have already considered his triperspectival analysis of divine lordship: control, authority, and presence. Throughout *DKG* we also find represented Frame's triperspectival analysis of human knowledge.[20] First, the *normative* perspective considers the norms for human intellectual activity: the standards, laws, principles, and criteria that apply to our truth-gathering and truth-utilizing. Second, the *situational* perspective considers the situation or circumstances in which the human knower is placed. In particular, it concerns the external objects or matters of fact toward which human thoughts are directed. Finally, as a necessary complement to these two outward-oriented perspectives, the *existential* perspective considers the subjective, internal, personal aspects of human knowledge. Note that the ordering of the perspectives here (as in Frame's own writings) is incidental. No one perspective is more important than any other or reducible to any other. Each perspective must be considered in conjunction with the other

17. See *PP*.

18. Thus Frame's "perspectival knowledge" roughly corresponds to what Van Til dubbed "analogical knowledge." See Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), 11–13; *The Defense of the Faith*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 39–46; *CVT*, 89–95.

19. See, e.g., *DG*, 743–50; also *PP*.

20. *DKG*, 73–75. *DKG*'s entire structure is designed to reflect this triad. Ibid., 4–5, 107.

two; together they furnish us with a balanced and unified understanding (recall the earlier house-viewing analogy).[21]

On what basis does Frame identify and distinguish these three perspectives on knowledge? It turns out that Frame sees multiple lines of support for triperspectivalism in epistemology.[22] First, there is the classical distinction between the *subject* of knowledge (that which knows), the *object* of knowledge (that which is known), and the *relation* of knowledge (that by which the knower knows the known). These can be seen to correspond directly to the existential, situational, and normative perspectives.[23] Second, triperspectivalism is reflected in the distinctions between the three basic sources and objects of human knowledge: knowledge from and about *God* (the Creator), knowledge from and about *nature* (the created external world), and knowledge from and about *self* (the created internal world).[24]

As a further consideration, Frame points to parallels between epistemology and ethics; in fact, he argues that epistemology can be profitably viewed "as a subdivision of ethics, describing our obligations in the realm of knowledge."[25] His three perspectives arise in various places in ethics— for example, in the distinction between the *standard* (normative), the *goal*

21. At times Frame makes remarks about each perspective's "including" the other two that seem to erode their distinctiveness. One example, from his discussion of the role of the will in knowledge: "Which of our three perspectives does it fall under? Well, it doesn't much matter, since each perspective includes the others." *DKG*, 344; cf. ibid., 243. In another passage he makes the confusing claim that the knowledge gained through each perspective is "ultimately identical." Ibid., 89. Cf. *DG*, 213; *DCL*, 35. Perhaps this tension can be resolved by following Gottlob Frege's distinction between *sense* and *referent*. "Clark Kent," "Superman," and "the last survivor of the planet Krypton" have distinct senses but identical referents. Indeed, there is a sense (!) in which a sense is one perspective on a referent.

22. Frame does not appear to give any priority to these considerations, and none should be inferred from the order in which I discuss them.

23. The normativity of the knowledge relation is seen in the fact that the subject and the object must be related *in the right way* for there to be knowledge. Not just *any* subject-object relation will do. We will revisit this important point in the next section.

24. These distinctions give rise to nine different forms of source-object knowledge: knowledge from God about God; knowledge from God about nature; knowledge from God about self; knowledge from nature about God; and so on. As Frame explains in "Backgrounds to My Thought" and elsewhere, this particular triad is inspired by Van Til's treatment of revelation in *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 64–74. In *DKG*, Frame cashes out the triad in terms of "the law," "the world," and "the self." *DKG*, 65–73. Concerning the first of these, Frame argues that since all ultimate normativity derives from God, we can identify God with God's law (broadly conceived). "To know God is to know His law. . . . God's law then is God himself; God himself is law to His creation." Ibid., 63.

25. *DKG*, 62–64, 73–75. Cf. *AGG*, 102–4; *DCL*, 178n5.

(situational), and the *motive* (existential) for human actions, each of which must be taken into account when determining whether or not a particular action is "moral" or "good."[26] The need to maintain a triperspectival balance in ethics is further suggested by the three-sided war in the history of modern ethics, between the deontological (rule-based) camp, the utilitarian (outcome-based) camp, and the subjectivist (feelings-based) camp.[27] Insofar as epistemology mirrors ethics, then, the three perspectives will prove as illuminating for the former as for the latter.

Finally, the three perspectives can be correlated with Frame's triad of lordship attributes. God's *authority* provides the standards for human knowledge (God's law). God's *control* accounts for the existence of the orderly, knowable world in which we are situated; the facts are what they are by the outworking of God's sovereign decree. God's *presence* is manifested in his *first-personal* covenantal immanence (God with *us*).[28]
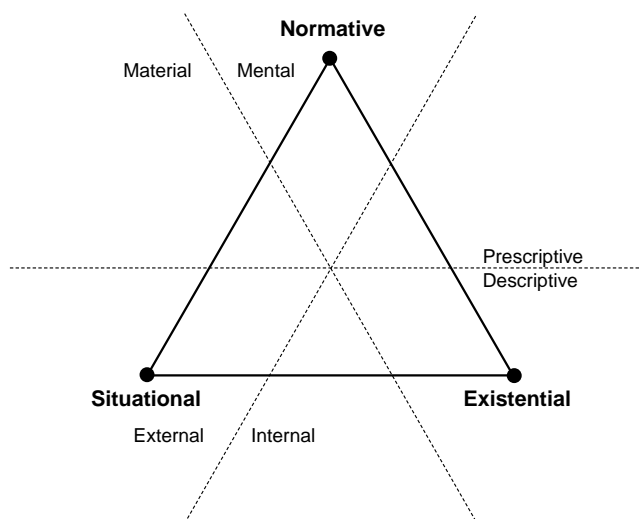


**Fig. 19.1. Triperspectivalism and Common Philosophical Distinctions**

It's hard to deny that Frame's triperspectival approach exhibits a certain appealing symmetry. In addition to the considerations above, we might note

26. *DCL*, 8. Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971).

27. *DCL*, 49–53.

28. Cf. *PP*. I confess that I find this to be one of Frame's less evident correlations, but I have tried here to express it in the way that makes the best sense to me.

that the perspectives can be paired off (see Figure 1) in ways that correlate with some commonplace philosophical distinctions: between the prescriptive and the descriptive (cf. the fact-value distinction); between the "external world" and the "internal world"; and between the mental (or consciousness-dependent) and the material (or consciousness-independent). It seems, therefore, that Frame's triperspectivalism is a well-motivated analytical tool.

## Triperspectivalism and "Mainstream" Epistemology

Frame's triperspectival methodology is certainly innovative and suggestive. But given that it was developed in an explicitly Christian context, we might wonder whether it has any relevance to "mainstream" epistemology. Can it illuminate any issues of concern to contemporary philosophers of knowledge? In this section, I want to highlight several areas that suggest further confirmation of the applicability and fruitfulness of triperspectival analysis.

### Three Traditions in the History of Epistemology

In the first place, as Frame himself suggests, triperspectivalism offers a useful framework for understanding the history of epistemology and recognizing where many prominent theories of knowledge go wrong. One of the central questions asked by epistemologists is this: What serves as the basis or foundation for human knowledge? The history of answers to this question can be usefully divided into three traditions. The rationalist tradition answers in terms of *laws* and *criteria*: our knowledge is founded on certain indubitable first principles, such as the laws of logic and mathematics, and what can be rigorously deduced from them. The empiricist tradition, in contrast, puts emphasis on *facts* and *evidences*: our knowledge is founded on directly observable facts about the external world. The subjectivist tradition, a third contender, pitches its tent on the plain of *personal consciousness*: our knowledge is founded on what subjectively strikes each individual knower as true or credible. It isn't hard to see that each of these traditions takes one of Frame's three perspectives and absolutizes it at the expense of the others. But the ironic consequence is that all three traditions lead us into a dead end of debilitating skepticism. Rationalism furnishes us at best with abstract theoretical truths that are disconnected from our experience of the world. Empiricism undermines itself because it cannot justify its foundational assumption that our senses actually connect us to an external world of facts;

441

in the end, it reduces to solipsism. Subjectivism fares no better than its two competitors. In its purest form it collapses into relativism; thus the original question "What serves as the basis or foundation for human knowledge?" turns out to have no person-independent answer after all. The moral of the story is that any adequate account of knowledge must acknowledge and balance considerations from *all three perspectives*.[29]

### The Tripartite Definition of *Knowledge*

A second confirmation of the relevance of Frame's triperspectivalism is suggested by the standard tripartite analysis of knowledge.[30] Until the 1960s, *knowledge* was commonly defined as "justified true belief," based on a surface analysis of the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge.[31] Consider first what is necessary for Sam to know some proposition—say, the proposition that the cat is on the mat. At a minimum, Sam must *believe* that the cat is on the mat, for it seems obvious that one cannot know what one doesn't even believe. Furthermore, Sam's belief that the cat is on the mat must be *true*; the cat must, as a matter of fact, be on the mat. It seems equally obvious that one can know only truths and not falsehoods. So already we can see that whatever knowledge is, it must involve *true belief*.

Yet surely not every true belief counts as knowledge. Suppose Sam has taken a hallucinogenic drug and experiences a vision of his cat, Felix, sitting on his front-door mat. Unable to distinguish between the vision and reality, he comes to *believe* that the cat is on the mat. At that very moment, however, it just so happens that Felix *is* sitting on the mat. Sam's belief would thus be *true*. But does Sam really *know* that his cat is on the mat? Our intuitive

29. Cf. *DKG*, 109–22. Frame is the first to acknowledge that no one figure in the history of philosophy represents any of these three traditions in an absolutely pure form. Even those who lean heavily toward one tradition (e.g., David Hume for the empiricist camp) typically end up tipping their hats to the other traditions in response to criticisms. But these concessions and qualifications only serve to confirm Frame's contention that we fall into problems when we privilege one perspective over the other two.

30. Here I focus on what is termed *propositional* knowledge: knowledge *that* such-and-such. It is distinguished from other kinds of knowledge, such as knowledge *of* such-and-such (immediate acquaintance) and "know-how." Contemporary epistemologists tend to focus most attention on propositional knowledge, mainly because the problem of refuting skepticism is typically expressed in terms of propositional knowledge.

31. This standard definition is sometimes traced back to remarks by Plato in the *Theaetetus* and the *Meno*. See, e.g., Paul K. Moser, "Tripartite Definition of Knowledge," in *A Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 509.

answer to the question is no. It follows that true belief is necessary but not sufficient for knowledge. Something else is needed: some third ingredient that bridges the gap between merely true belief and knowledge. What many epistemologists have wanted to say is that Sam's true belief must also be *justified*, where the justification in question is understood in terms of something like possession of sufficient evidential grounds. Put simply, Sam must also have good reasons or evidence to support his belief that the cat is on the mat. In this case, however, he lacks such reasons or evidence because his belief is held on the basis of a nonveridical hallucination.

Based on considerations such as these, the tripartite definition of *knowledge* as "justified true belief" has been widely endorsed. But note that each of the three components corresponds to one of Frame's three perspectives. *Justification* represents the normative component of knowledge. It shows that not just *any* true belief counts as knowledge; a true belief must meet certain standards or norms of reason before it can rise to the status of knowledge. *Truth* represents the situational component of knowledge. Knowledge necessarily involves a connection to the facts of the matter. We can't know what isn't factual; our knowledge must correspond to the way the world really is—to how it is situated. *Belief* represents the existential component of knowledge. Whereas truth is external and person-independent—postmodernist confusions notwithstanding—a belief is an internal mental state that constitutes a *personal* intellectual commitment on the part of the knower. So this standard analysis of knowledge consists of normative, situational, and existential components.

Readers familiar with contemporary epistemology will be aware, however, that the standard tripartite definition of *knowledge* has fallen on hard times. In 1963, a three-page journal article by Edmund Gettier sent shock waves through the philosophical community that still reverberate today.[32] Gettier offered several counterexamples to the standard definition: hypothetical scenarios in which a person has a justified true belief yet apparently lacks knowledge. It is widely conceded today (on the basis of a never-ending stream of "Gettier counterexamples") that justified true belief is *not* sufficient for knowledge after all.

Does this cast a shadow over Frame's triperspectival scheme? Actually, no. It remains relatively uncontroversial that knowledge requires both truth and belief and also that mere true belief is insufficient for knowledge. Knowledge must be true belief *plus* something else. Alvin Plantinga has proposed

---

32. Edmund L. Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121–23.

that the term *warrant* (rather than *justification*, which arguably carries too much prejudicial baggage) be used to refer to whatever it is that bridges the gap between mere true belief and knowledge. *Knowledge* can thus be generally defined as "warranted true belief," even while debate persists as to what constitutes warrant. Nevertheless, despite the continuing disagreement, it's reasonably clear that warrant must pertain to the normative dimension of knowledge. A true belief is warranted only if it is held in the right kind of way or on the right kind of grounds. *Warrant* is thus an evaluative category along with closely related terms such as *justification* and *rationality*. It is concerned with norms of belief-production, belief-retention, and belief-revision.

### Knowledge and Proper Cognitive Function

In the aftermath of Gettier's controlled detonation, the focus in contemporary epistemology has largely shifted toward an analysis of epistemic warrant (as defined above). What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for warrant? Some epistemologists have argued that warrant is simply the classical notion of justification plus some additional (fourth) ingredient, such as "indefeasibility," crafted to plug the hole in the dike. Others have contended that justification is neither necessary nor sufficient for warrant; warrant is thus quite distinct from justification in the classical sense.

One of the most innovative and, in my judgment, persuasive accounts of warrant has been developed and defended by Plantinga. At the heart of his account is the notion of *proper cognitive function*: a belief is warranted only if it is produced by cognitive faculties that are functioning properly—that is, operating in the way they were designed to operate. Plantinga shows that most other recent accounts of warrant fall short because they overlook this aspect of proper cognitive function. For example, consider reliabilist accounts of warrant. According to reliabilism (in its simplest form), a belief is warranted only if it is formed through cognitive processes that are generally reliable, i.e., processes that produce predominantly true beliefs. The problem with such accounts, Plantinga argues, is that the cognitive processes in question could be reliable due to sheer dumb luck. If my beliefs happen to be true only by luck, by mere good fortune, then I cannot be said to *know* what I believe.[33]

33. Plantinga offers the hypothetical example of a man struck by a burst of cosmic rays that affect his cognitive function. After the incident, whenever the man hears the word *prime* he involuntarily forms a belief, with respect to a randomly selected natural number between 1 and 100,000, that it is not a prime number. Since most of the numbers in that range aren't primes, it

Plantinga summarizes his own proper-function account of warrant as follows:

> According to the central and paradigmatic core of our notion of warrant (so I say) a belief *B* has warrant for you if and only if (1) the cognitive faculties involved in the production of *B* are functioning properly (and this is to include the relevant defeater systems as well as those systems, if any, that provide *propositional* inputs to the system in question); (2) your cognitive environment is sufficiently similar to the one for which your cognitive faculties are designed; (3) the triple of the design plan governing the production of the belief in question involves, as purpose or function, the production of true beliefs (and the same goes for elements of the design plan governing the production of input beliefs to the system in question); and (4) the design plan is a good one: that is, there is a high statistical or objective probability that the belief produced in accordance with the relevant segment of the design plan in that sort of environment is true. Under the conditions, furthermore, the degree of warrant is given by some monotonically increasing function of the strength of S's belief that *B*. This account of warrant, therefore, depends essentially on the notion of proper function.[34]

The details of Plantinga's account, and the arguments by which he supports his analysis, need not concern us. All I wish to note here is that Plantinga's sophisticated post-Gettier analysis of warrant also reflects Frame's triperspectival scheme.[35] The normative perspective is found in the notion of *proper function*; a cognitive faculty can be said to function properly only if it proceeds according to certain design norms. The situational perspective is found in Plantinga's concept of a *cognitive environment*. Our cognitive faculties are designed to furnish us with true beliefs in specific environments (e.g., our perceptual faculties work optimally for medium-sized objects on the surface of this planet in adequate lighting conditions). This is just to say that we need to be situated in certain ways for our beliefs to be warranted.

---

turns out that the vast majority of these beliefs will be true, despite their strange provenance. So the cognitive process responsible for these beliefs is reliable, statistically speaking. But it ought to be evident that the true beliefs formed by such a process would not count as *knowledge*. Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 210.

34. Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 194.

35. Since we have already identified warrant with the normative perspective on knowledge, it also illustrates Frame's contention that we often find triads within triads.

Finally, the existential perspective is found in Plantinga's suggestion that the *degree* to which a belief is warranted will depend (among other things) on the firmness or subjective confidence with which the belief is held.[36]

The fact that Frame's triad of normative, situational, and existential perspectives can be discerned here and elsewhere in "mainstream" epistemological discussions suggests that Frame is on to something important. In my view, triperspectivalism is rightly understood not as a theory of knowledge but rather as an analytical tool that can assist epistemologists in at least three ways: (1) as a guard against imbalance and omission in our analyses of knowledge and related concepts;[37] (2) as a means of obtaining greater insight into any topic under examination;[38] and (3) as a source of inspiration for new theories or methods.[39] Triperspectivalism should not be regarded as a competitor to contemporary epistemological theories (such as Plantinga's) but rather as one fruitful approach to developing, critiquing, and refining such theories.

## Divine Lordship: Presuppositionalism in Principle

Since I have been invited to write under the title "Presuppositionalism and Frame's Epistemology," it is time for me to shift gears and turn from Frame's epistemology to his work in apologetics. It comes as no surprise to find that there is a close relationship between the two; in what follows, I will try to explain how the former underwrites the latter.

Frame is commonly labeled a "presuppositionalist" because he endorses the apologetic vision of Cornelius Van Til.[40] Arguably, the term *presuppositionalist* is ill suited to capture what is distinctive about this

36. Ibid., 7–9, 194.
37. Many of the deficiencies found in theories of knowledge, both ancient and modern, can be understood as a failure to accommodate one or more of Frame's three perspectives. For example: naturalized epistemologies neglect the normative perspective; coherentist epistemologies, by severing the connection between justification and the external world, fail to accommodate the situational perspective; and some externalist epistemologies fall short under the existential perspective by not recognizing important internalist (subjective) constraints on epistemic warrant.
38. The idea here is that, as a general principle, adopting multiple perspectives promotes better understanding, and that Frame's normative, situational, and existential perspectives are particularly pervasive and illuminating in this regard.
39. Note that these three points apply not only to epistemology but also to ethics, theology, apologetics, psychology, and other fields.
40. "I believe that Van Til's approach is still the best foundation for Christian apologetics at the present time." *AGG*, xi.

apologetic tradition.[41] After all, few modern-day representatives of the different schools in Christian apologetics would deny that both Christians and non-Christians have philosophical presuppositions, that these presuppositions have a major bearing on how we evaluate arguments and evidences, and that any effective approach to apologetics must take such considerations into account. So the recognition of the importance of presuppositions is hardly distinctive to "presuppositionalists" such as Van Til and Frame. No more illuminating is the claim that disciples of this school insist that all apologetic arguments must "presuppose God" or "presuppose Christianity"—a highly ambiguous characterization that has led to the frequent misconception that presuppositionalists advocate question-begging arguments. Instead, I wish to suggest that the core of presuppositionalism can be encapsulated in two foundational principles: the *No-Neutrality Principle* and the *No-Autonomy Principle*.[42]

According to the No-Neutrality Principle, no one can approach any intellectual endeavor from a position of strict religious neutrality. Whenever we apply our minds to a particular subject matter, we inevitably bring with us a host of presuppositions—that is, tacit philosophical assumptions—about human nature, human origins, human reason, the constitution of reality, the laws of nature, the source of values, purpose, meaning, and ultimately God. These presuppositions may not be articulated or admitted—indeed, a person may not even be aware of them—but they are held nonetheless. Without such presuppositions, our thinking could not get off the ground in the first place, for they supply the necessary framework for meaningful thought, the scaffolding for every intellectual construction project from the majestic to the mundane. At the very least, a person's presuppositions will be implicit in the way he evaluates evidence and interprets his experiences, in how he makes judgments about what is possible or plausible or valuable, and in how he actually lives daily life. Significantly, many of these presuppositions concern religious matters, either directly or by implication. For example, how a person views human nature (that is, what kind of being he thinks he is) will inevitably impinge on such matters as the origins of the universe, the existence and nature of God, and the purpose of life. Thus, every single person exhibits *some* religious bias—the atheist no less than the Christian,

41. Cf. *AGG*, 12n16; Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 219n16.

42. Cf. *AGG*, 3–9, 42–43, 88.

the Muslim, and the Hindu.[43] Since religious neutrality is impossible in principle, it's misguided to speak and act as though it were possible or even preferable—as though we could simply "bracket out" our most significant and influential presuppositions when considering any subject matter.[44]

When placed in the context of a biblical worldview, the No-Neutrality Principle leads naturally to the No-Autonomy Principle. The first principle states that everyone has philosophical precommitments, many of which are religious in nature or have substantial religious implications. The second principle states that there are ultimately only two kinds of philosophical precommitments—those that are *for* God and those that are *against* God—and that only the former are acceptable. In short, either we are committed to the idea that God and his Word are our ultimate authority and standard in every area of life, including our intellectual endeavors, or we are committed (at least implicitly) to some *other* ultimate authority and standard—which amounts to a rejection of God and his Word. Either we acknowledge that we are creatures whose thoughts should be conformed to the mind of our Creator or we don't. And those who locate their ultimate authority and standard elsewhere than in the mind of God invariably try to locate it in the mind of man. (What other relevant mind is there?) Consequently, what is reasonable, plausible, possible, and so on turns out to be what conforms to our own "natural" patterns of thought. As noted earlier, the word *autonomy* literally means "self-law." An autonomous thinker is one whose mind has become a law unto itself: not subject to any higher authority or corrective standard. According to the No-Autonomy Principle, this understanding of human reason must be firmly rejected.

Taken together, these two presuppositionalist principles assert that everyone thinks with some kind of religious bias, and that the only acceptable religious bias is one submissive to the ultimate authority of God and his Word.

---

43. Not even the professing agnostic can escape such bias. First of all, in practice no one can suspend all belief, inference, and choice. Yet every belief, inference, and choice takes for granted some metaphysical framework that renders it intelligible. Furthermore, the central plea of the agnostic—"I honestly don't know"—presupposes certain ideas about man and God and divine revelation (e.g., that humans are not fallen in sin, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness; that God is hidden; that God's self-revelation is ambiguous and inefficacious).

44. For a penetrating defense of the No-Neutrality Principle, see Roy G. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

It seems to me that Frame's "theology of knowledge," centered as it is on the doctrine of divine lordship, provides solid support for both the No-Neutrality Principle and the No-Autonomy Principle. Consider the three lordship attributes in turn. God's *authority* implies that God determines the standards and criteria for human thought and reason. Our pursuit of truth must submit to the authority of his revealed Word. If the human mind, along with the rest of creation, stands under the law of God, it cannot be a law unto itself. So there must be no autonomy. Furthermore, none of us can be indifferent toward God's authority. Failure to acknowledge and submit to God's authority is a de facto rejection of it. So there can be no neutrality.

God's *control* implies that the whole of creation lies under God's sovereign sway, subject to his comprehensive decree. Every contingent fact is as it is because of the will of God. This implies that every fact reveals God, objectively speaking, and that no fact can be properly interpreted without reference to God. All facts are God's facts. All truths are God's truths. There can be no God-neutral interpretations of the facts—which is to say that there can be no neutrality. In order to properly interpret the world, we must conform our patterns of thought to those of the Original Interpreter—which is to say that there must be no autonomy.

God's *presence* implies that we live and breathe in a God-pervaded universe.[45] Since all things are conditioned by God's immanence, there are no "neutral public spaces" in which studies and debates can be conducted without reference to him. Moreover, God's presence (as Frame expounds it) is bound up with the biblical theme that God relates to us primarily by way of covenant. Each of us is either a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker; there is no third option.[46] So we think either in covenant-keeping ways or in covenant-breaking ways.[47] There can be no neutrality. And since covenant-keeping thought is submissive to God's authoritative revelation and seeks to conform to the mind of the Creator, it is *antithetical* to autonomous thought. There must be no autonomy.

45. Jer. 23:23–24; Acts 17:24–28.

46. In terms of classical Reformed theology, our federal representative is either Adam (the covenant-breaker) or Christ (the covenant-keeper). If we are not under the terms and blessings of the covenant of grace, we are under the terms and curses of the covenant of works.

47. This is not to suggest, of course, that believers never think in God-dishonoring ways! Rather, it is a question of one's settled intellectual and spiritual orientation. Cf. Frame's remarks about a "presuppositionalism of the heart" in *AGG*, 87–88.

If Frame's conclusions about divine lordship and its implications for human thought have solid exegetical support, then, by the foregoing argument, so do the two foundational principles of presuppositional apologetics. Does this mean that the Van Tillian cause has been vindicated? We must be careful here. I suspect that most evangelical Christian apologists today, if asked whether they agree with the No-Neutrality Principle and the No-Autonomy Principle, would reply with an emphatic *Yes*. When the question is explicitly raised, there tends to be *formal* agreement across the board. So what really distinguishes presuppositionalists such as Frame from their classicalist and evidentialist colleagues? Just this: the latter rarely mention these principles in their discussions of apologetic method or allow them to have any impact on their apologetic practice. Yet the two principles are far from irrelevant. In the first place, they indicate that what is at stake between the believer and the unbeliever is *a clash of entire systems*. The two parties in the debate are committed to conflicting views of God, man, divine revelation, and human reason. Thus the ultimate criteria by which the unbeliever makes judgments about truth, evidence, possibility, probability, and so forth are fundamentally at odds with those of the believer. It's not merely that we have to persuade the unbeliever to add one more item (God) to his ontology or to add one more event (the resurrection) to his historiography, as though he merely needed the few missing pieces of a near-complete jigsaw puzzle. The problem is that the unbeliever wants to draw pieces from a different box altogether! This understanding of the apologetic challenge cannot but affect the tack one takes.

So how do our two presuppositionalist principles cash out in terms of apologetic method and practice? In my judgment, they do not rule out the use of traditional philosophical, scientific, or historical arguments for Christian theism, despite what some presuppositionalists have claimed. Even so, they do raise important questions about how we formulate and present those arguments, what we should expect of the unbelievers we engage with, and how we should respond when unbelievers resist those arguments. What should we take to be the common ground between Christians and non-Christians? What do *they* take to be the common ground—and should we address their misconceptions on that point? What forms of "natural theology" are possible and permissible? What message does it convey when an apologist invites unbelievers to treat divinely inspired Gospels "just like any other ancient historical documents"? How appropriate are minimalist defenses of the resurrection that appeal to "critical methods endorsed by most secular

historians"? Is the project of theodicy biblically warranted—and if so, on what terms should it proceed? If the debate between the believer and the unbeliever boils down to a clash between ultimate epistemic authorities, how can a dialectical stalemate be avoided?[48] How should we address the objection that the Bible couldn't be divinely inspired because some of its core doctrines seem impossible to formulate in a logically consistent fashion?

I don't mean to suggest that there are obvious and straightforward answers to such questions. Quite the opposite. My point is simply that questions such as these are rarely asked in the first place by budding Christian apologists. Yet to overlook or ignore them is no more responsible than, say, to conduct infant baptisms without raising and answering questions about the purpose and significance of the sacraments, or to deliver a sermon without first reflecting carefully on what the Bible teaches about the goals and responsibilities of preaching. Scripture clearly has more to say about the defense of the faith than the bare exhortation to defend the faith.

## Triperspectivalism: Presuppositionalism in Practice

Presuppositionalists are often criticized for being long on theory and short on practice.[49] A survey of the primary literature on presuppositional apologetics suggests that this charge has more than a grain of truth to it. I

48. The prospect of a "presuppositional standoff" between two competing systems of thought, in which each advances its own ultimate criteria for adjudicating between such systems, was one reason why Van Til advocated the use of transcendental argumentation. The idea is that such argumentation can resolve disputes at the system level without begging the question in favor of either system. For elaboration of this point, see my article "If Knowledge Then God: The Epistemological Theistic Arguments of Plantinga and Van Til," *Calvin Theological Journal* 40 (2005): 49–75, also available online at http://www.proginosko.com/docs/IfKnowledgeThenGod.pdf (accessed May 14, 2009). Although I cannot argue the point here, I believe Frame is mistaken in his suggestion (*AGG*, 73; "Presuppositional Apologetics," 220–21) that transcendental arguments are not substantially different from other forms of theistic argument. The former can be distinguished from the latter with respect to the scope, subject matter, and modality of their premises. For now, an analogy will have to substitute for an argument: traditional theistic arguments proceed from *what we see*, whereas transcendental arguments proceed from *the possibility of sight*.

49. See Frame's own admission in *AGG*, 203. Two notable exceptions are the late Greg Bahnsen, who conducted a number of public debates with atheists and other non-Christians, and Douglas Wilson, who has directly engaged with the anti-Christian polemics of two of the "New Atheists," Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens. In fairness to Frame, we should not overlook his online debate with atheist philosopher Michael Martin (available at http://www.infidels.org and http://www.reformed.org), which represents a concrete application of his methodology.

hope that the final section of this essay will redress the balance somewhat by showing how Frame's triperspectival presuppositionalism can be applied toward a penetrating critique of one of the most prominent unbelieving worldviews of our day.[50]

Alvin Plantinga has suggested that the two most prominent worldviews in competition with Christian theism in the West today are "perennial naturalism" and "creative antirealism."[51] I believe he is right in this observation, although I will focus here only on the first of these. Naturalism, simply stated, is the view that nature is all there is. The universe is a causally closed spatiotemporal system—and that's it. Thus the only things that exist are *natural* things, that is, things that are spatiotemporal in nature, enter into causal relationships with one another, and can be studied by the natural sciences (all of which ultimately reduce to physics).[52] According to the naturalist, therefore, everything can be ultimately explained in terms of fundamental physical entities (such as particles, waves, and fields—whatever the current ontology of the empirical sciences happens to be) in conjunction with the natural laws that describe their behavior. Consequently, there exist no supernatural or nonnatural beings, such as souls, ghosts, angels, or—most importantly—God.

Naturalism thus construed is taken for granted by a large proportion of philosophers and scientists in the West today. It also holds considerable sway in other academic fields, such as psychology, medicine, law, and ethics. It is the basic worldview aggressively promoted by the so-called New

50. The critique takes the form of a series of negative transcendental arguments, which aim to show that certain anti-Christian metaphysical claims would, if true, render human reason and knowledge impossible in principle. In terms of Frame's three perspectives on apologetics, I am engaging in "apologetics as offense." *AGG*, 2–3.

51. Alvin Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," *The Monist* 75 (1992): 291–320; Plantinga, "Christian Philosophy at the End of the 20th Century," in *The Analytic Theist*, ed. James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 328–52. Creative antirealism is the view that the world that each of us experiences and inhabits is ultimately a construction of our own minds. It is the worldview most commonly associated with postmodernist epistemology, although its origins go back at least as far as Immanuel Kant.

52. In one influential article, D. M. Armstrong defined *naturalism* as "the doctrine that reality consists of nothing but a single all-embracing spatio-temporal system." Armstrong, "Naturalism, Materialism and First Philosophy," *Philosophia* 8 (1978): 261–76. Bruce Aune expresses a similarly naturalistic outlook when he defines *existence* as "belong[ing] to the space-time-causal system that is our world." Aune, *Metaphysics: The Elements* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 35.

Atheists.[53] Advocates of naturalism are known to celebrate the rationality of their worldview: it is routinely presented as the most parsimonious, elegant, and homogenous view of reality, from which all objects of religious superstition have been shaved away by Occam's razor. But how rational is it when subjected to closer scrutiny? I will argue that if we subject this influential worldview to a triperspectival analysis, it quickly becomes apparent that *naturalism actually rules out the possibility of knowledge altogether*. Ironically, the antitheistic worldview that is praised in our day as the epitome of reason turns out to be one of the worst enemies of reason.

Take first the *normative* perspective on knowledge. I have already explained how any adequate analysis of human knowledge must account for its normative component (whether that component is labeled *justification*, *warrant*, or whatever). Roughly put, a meaningful distinction must be drawn between true beliefs that are formed "in the right way" or held "on good grounds" (and thus qualify as knowledge) and those that are formed "in the wrong way" or held "on poor grounds." Likewise, the very notion of rationality is irreducibly normative: to be rational means, at a minimum, to conform to certain norms of thought. Core epistemic concepts such as justification, warrant, and rationality pertain to how we *should* think rather than how we *do in fact* think.[54]

But the problem for metaphysical naturalism, as Plantinga (among others) has pointed out, is that it appears to leave no place for normativity:

> Naturalism, it seems to me, is eminently attackable. Its Achilles' heel (in addition to its deplorable falsehood) is that it has no room for *normativity*. There is no room, within naturalism, for right or wrong, or good or bad. . . . Naturalism also lacks room for the notion of *proper function* for non-artifacts, and hence lacks room for the notion of proper function for our

53. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006); Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (London: Allen Lane, 2006); Sam Harris, *The End of Faith* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2005); Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007); Victor J. Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007).

54. "[Epistemic] justification manifestly is normative. If a belief is justified for us, then it is *permissible* and *reasonable*, from the epistemic point of view, for us to hold it, and it would be *epistemically irresponsible* to hold beliefs that contradict it. . . . Epistemology is a normative discipline as much as, and in the same sense as, normative ethics." Jaegwon Kim, "What Is 'Naturalized Epistemology'?" in *Philosophical Perspectives 2*, ed. James E. Tomberlin (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing, 1988), 383 (emphasis in original).

cognitive faculties. It therefore has no room for the notion of knowledge, at least if the account of warrant given in *Warrant and Proper Function* is anywhere near correct.[55]

Plantinga refers here to his own analysis of warrant, which is certainly incompatible with metaphysical naturalism, but one does not have to accept his particular analysis to grant the broader point. If the naturalist's view is correct, then there simply are no truths about the way the world *ought to be*. There are only truths about the way the world *actually is*. If the world is explicable entirely in terms of the physical sciences—in terms of para-digmatic physical properties such as mass, velocity, and electrical charge—then normative judgments are strictly meaningless. After all, physics is a descriptive science, not a prescriptive one. No purely physical account can tell us in principle how the world ought to be—including how a certain species of organism ought to think. But as we have seen, an examination of our commonsense notion of knowledge shows that it *must* have a norma-tive component. The consequence is obvious: if naturalism were true, there could be no knowledge.[56]

It's worth noting that some naturalists have candidly conceded the point. Following the lead of W. V. Quine, advocates of "naturalized epis-temology" have argued that traditional epistemology needs to be radically reconfigured (some would say replaced) in light of our modern commitment to the natural sciences—or, more precisely, in light of *their* ideological com-mitment to the exhaustive explanatory power of the natural sciences. This proposal boils down to the conviction that epistemology (how humans ought to think) must be reduced to psychology (how humans do in fact think). But this move is not so much a plausible defense of naturalism as an indication of just how high a price a thoroughgoing naturalism exacts. As a solution to naturalism's inhospitableness toward normativity, the suggestion that we should swap in psychology for epistemology amounts to little more than an attempt to change the subject. It is no more satisfactory than to replace applied ethics (how humans ought to behave) with empirical sociology (how humans do in fact behave). Modern-day antisupernaturalists are often aware

55. Alvin Plantinga, "Afterword," in *The Analytic Theist*, 356.

56. In fact, there could be no ignorance or irrationality either, for there would be no intel-ligible distinction between *warranted* and *unwarranted* or between *rational* and *irrational*. Any kind of normative epistemic judgment, whether positive or negative, is objectively meaningless in a naturalist ontology.

of the difficulty of accounting for objective *moral* norms within a naturalistic framework, but most are blissfully unaware of the parallel difficulty of accounting for objective *epistemic* norms.[57]

Let us turn now to the *situational* perspective on knowledge. This perspective invites us to consider the objects of knowledge. What exactly is it that we know? According to one view, what we know (or aspire to know) are *facts*. Philosophers often characterize facts as "states of affairs," such as *Bob's being six feet tall*, *Susan's purchasing of the chair*, and *Michael's washing of his car*.[58] But what sort of things are facts or states of affairs? A good argument can be made that they must be necessary, abstract entities, rather than contingent, concrete entities such as trees, tables, transistors, and other physical objects. Facts must certainly be distinguished from the objects to which those facts pertain: *Michael's washing of his car* is quite distinct from Michael and his car, not least because the latter could exist without the former (and vice versa, if there are such things as past facts and future facts). But if facts are abstract in nature, they are not spatiotemporal entities; thus they are not the sort of things that can be analyzed by the physical sciences. In short, there seems to be no clear place for facts (thus construed) in a strictly naturalistic ontology.[59]

A similar argument can be made with respect to *truths*, which would also be suitable candidates for the objects of our knowledge. When I claim to know *that* such-and-such, I'm claiming to know a *truth*—say, the truth that Bob is six feet tall, or that Susan is purchasing the chair, or that Michael is washing his car. But what exactly is a truth? A truth is a proposition; more precisely, it is a *true* proposition.[60] Propositions, simply put, are entities that

57. For further discussion of this point, see my online essay "The Theistic Preconditions of Knowledge: A Thumbnail Sketch," http://www.proginosko.com/docs/knowledge_and_theism.html (accessed May 14, 2009).

58. States of affairs are typically expressed with gerund verb forms. Thus, in speaking of our knowledge of states of affairs, we might say (somewhat awkwardly), "I know of Bob's being six feet tall," "I know of Susan's purchasing of the chair," and "I know of Michael's washing of his car." (Note the possessive use of the apostrophe in these examples.)

59. Couldn't a naturalist say that states of affairs *just are* physical objects configured in particular ways? There are a number of reasons why this won't do. One is that it's hard to see how modal facts (facts about possibilities and necessities) could be constituted by nothing more than how physical objects are actually configured. Modal facts about how nature *could be* and *must be* go beyond how the physical world *actually is*. But modal facts cannot be dismissed as irrelevant; they are ineradicable components of our understanding of the world.

60. This is why epistemologists describe knowledge *that* such-and-such as "propositional knowledge." In English, the word *that* picks out a proposition as the object of knowledge.

can possess a truth-value, i.e., they can be either true or false.[61] If propositions are the objects of knowledge, it follows that knowledge presupposes the existence of propositions. No propositions implies no knowledge. The problem for naturalists is that propositions don't appear to be physical entities or reducible to physical entities. In the first place, the properties most characteristic of propositions—the properties of *truth* and *falsity*—are nothing like physical properties, such as mass, velocity, and electrical charge. Furthermore, propositions have no location in space at all. (What sense does it make to say that the *truth* that Bob is taller than Jack resides at a particular address?) Second, it seems that propositions must exist independently of the physical universe. For example, if the physical universe had never existed—which is surely a possibility, since the universe has only contingent existence—there would still have been *truths*, such as the truth that no physical universe exists and the truth that a physical universe could have existed.

Recognizing that propositions are markedly unlike physical entities such as electrons and fields, some metaphysicians have tried to categorize them as *mental* entities. On this view, propositions reside in human minds and are the product of human mental activity. What should we make of this? It's true that propositions are more like mental objects than physical objects, but this is hardly a comfort for a metaphysical naturalist. Leaving aside the difficulty of accounting for *minds* on a naturalistic basis,[62] the second argument above shows that propositions cannot be dependent on human minds; for even if there were no human minds, there would still be truths (such as the truth that there are no human minds).

It thus appears that when naturalism is scrutinized from both the normative perspective and the situational perspective, its epistemological bankruptcy is exposed: first, in its inability to accommodate objective norms for human thought; and second, in its inability to accommodate facts and truths as real entities.

Consider finally the *existential* perspective on knowledge, which invites us to reflect on the subjective, personal component of human knowledge. Two particular problems for naturalism may be briefly highlighted here. First, let

61. Some philosophers would argue that propositions can also *lack* a truth-value, that is, they can be neither true nor false. Whether or not this view is correct has no bearing on my argument here. The important point is that only a proposition *could* be true or false.

62. See, e.g., Charles Talliaferro, "Naturalism and the Mind," in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (New York: Routledge, 2000), 133–55; J. P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

us recall the obvious point that knowledge requires a *subject* of knowledge—a knower—as well as an object. A knower must have the capacity for conscious thought. He must have an awareness of the object of knowledge and the ability to direct his thoughts toward it.[63] The immediate problem here for naturalism is that there seems to be no place in a naturalist worldview for consciousness as a real property. Consciousness, like truth, is wholly dissimilar to the sorts of "natural" properties that physicists routinely trade in. Consciousness in particular appears to be irreducibly subjective: it presents us with a first-person perspective that cannot be reduced to a third-person perspective. Science, as a strictly objective discipline, purports to give us subject-independent third-person descriptions of the world. But such descriptions will necessarily omit (or rule out) any irreducibly subjective reality. Suppose for the sake of argument that a naturalist could obtain an utterly exhaustive scientific description of the human brain and sense organs, the atmosphere of our planet, the electro-magnetic rays from the sun, and any other relevant physical reality. Such a description would tell us nothing about what it is like to experience a blue sky. Knowledge of our subjective experience of the world—in plain language, how it appears and feels to each of us—cannot in principle be reduced to scientific knowledge (empirical knowledge of particles, fields, etc.).

Another serious problem for naturalism arises from its difficulty in accounting for what philosophers call *intentionality*. We have already seen that having knowledge entails having beliefs. One distinctive feature of beliefs is that they are "about" other things. For example, my belief that Paris is the capital city of France is *about* something: the city of Paris. Our beliefs thus exhibit an external directedness: they refer to objects beyond themselves. The technical term for this "aboutness" is *intentionality*. One of the most interesting features of intentionality is that it appears to be a distinctively mental property. Purely physical things, such as puddles of water and rock formations, do not exhibit intentionality. They aren't "about" anything. (Just try asking such questions as these: "What is this puddle *about*?" "What does it *refer to*?")[64] Yet according to the natural-

63. Nonconscious physical objects, including computers, cannot be said to possess knowledge in anything but a derivative, analogical sense. Clearly, my Pocket PC does not literally *know* that I have a lunch appointment with a colleague next week, any more than a paper-based organizer would.

64. One might object that certain physical things, such as sentences written in ink on a page, can be "about" other things. But a moment's reflection should show that this is merely a derivative intentionality; physical inscriptions have meaning and reference only because of the prior

ist worldview, everything can be ultimately explained in purely physical terms, and what can't be so explained isn't real.[65] Naturalism thus appears unable to accommodate intentionality. Not only does it leave no room for the norms of knowledge and the objects of knowledge, it also leaves no room for the subjects of knowledge. In short, if the naturalist worldview were true, there could be no warranted true beliefs—there could be no knowledge.

I have argued that the application of Frame's triperspectivalism reveals a number of debilitating problems with one of the most prominent anti-Christian worldviews in the West today, problems that render it rationally untenable. Christian theism, with its more nourishing ontology, doesn't fall into the same difficulties. On the contrary, the reality of epistemic norms, objective truths, and finite consciousnesses make considerable sense in a worldview centered on the notion of an Absolute Person who delights to fashion creatures in his own image.[66]

In this essay I have tried to show (1) that Frame's epistemology of divine lordship is biblically warranted and has significant (yet frequently neglected) implications for all human intellectual endeavors; (2) that his triperspectival methodology is well motivated and can be an illuminating analytic tool in epistemology; (3) that his "theology of knowledge" provides ample support for the foundational principles of Van Tillian presuppositional apologetics; and (4) that triperspectivalism can be fruitfully applied in apologetics as the basis for exposing the serious philosophical shortcomings of one prominent anti-Christian worldview. Above all, I'm persuaded that Professor Frame has

---

interpretive activity of a (human) mind. So this only pushes the naturalist's problem back a step. The intentionality of written texts depends on the intentionality of human thoughts. But how can purely physical human brains exhibit intentionality?

65. Hence, as many commentators have noted, Daniel Dennett's books *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987) and *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1991) are not so much a naturalistic attempt to explain consciousness and intentionality as an attempt to explain them away.

66. Although space forbids elaboration, I believe similar critiques can be developed against other non-Christian worldviews, such as pantheism, panentheism, dualism, polytheism, and the more virulent strains of postmodernist thought. Insofar as post-modernism can be characterized as *hyper*-modernism—the modernist commitment to autonomy stripped of the remaining vestiges of Christian tradition and driven to its final destination—it actually serves to confirm our presuppositionalist critique of naturalism. The nominalism, antifoundationalism, antirealism, relativism, and nihilism propounded by postmodernists are arguably the "natural" fruit of a naturalist worldview, as Friedrich Nietzsche observed almost a century before Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty arrived at the party.

rendered an invaluable service to the church and to Christian scholarship by his clarion call to shun autonomy in *every* intellectual endeavor—not least in Christian philosophy and apologetics—and to submit every thought to the revealed Word of our sovereign, authoritative, and ever-present Lord.