Difficulties Surrounding the Apologetic Use of Worldview in Contemporary Calvinist Scholarship

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Introduction

Worldview has been applied across disciplines and has entered into ordinary language as a useful means of describing one's general perspective on life and one's foundational beliefs about reality. The intellectual lineage of *worldview* goes back to nineteenth century German *Weltanschauung philosophie*, especially the thought of Wilhelm Dilthey, which will be discussed below. However, *worldview* as a theoretical construct has also gained wide currency in Protestant Christianity, particularly in Reformed and neo-Calvinist circles. The import of the concept in this tradition has been to facilitate an articulation of a comprehensive and consistent Christian vision of life and the world. Through the efforts of Calvinist thinkers, at the scholarly and popular level, *worldview* has been employed in an apologetic capacity, and is often appealed to by Reformed thinkers as providing a place for the legitimacy of faith commitments within the secular academy. Arguing against the possibility of

worldview neutral reasoning, they have endeavoured to secure a fair hearing for those whose approach to academia is shaped by a Christian worldview.

However, despite much scholarship devoted to *Weltanschauung* within the Reformed community, one may still question the serviceability of this concept as a vehicle for accomplishing such aims. Perhaps latent philosophical implications, not fully appreciated by Christian proponents of *worldview*, reveal the concept to be less amenable to religious purposes than they have assumed. In what follows, I will argue that this is indeed the case and that *Weltanschauung* thinking does not safeguard the viability of a religious perspective but rather detracts from it. In support of this contention, I will raise

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three important objections against the utilization of *worldview* as a defence of traditional Protestant Christianity. These will be elaborated upon and extensively argued below.

First, *worldview* is too reliant upon an epistemological visualism which lends itself either to excessive rational objectivism on the one hand or relativistic perspectivism on the other. By epistemological visualism I mean the systematic overemphasis or reliance upon visual metaphors or analogies for rationality or knowledge. Visualism in this context is not to be equated with empiricism. As I will endeavour to demonstrate below, some prominent rationalists throughout the history of philosophy have been visualists in the above sense.

Secondly, *worldview* ties religion too closely with what Dilthey has called "the failure of metaphysics." Since, *Weltanschauung* developed in post-Kantian continental philosophy, this concept entails a skepticism regarding metaphysics. Indeed, Dilthey, the first to work out a systematic theory of worldviews, considered the *Weltanschauung* concept to be the culmination of the failure of metaphysics. For Dilthey, *worldviews*, as opposed to metaphysical systems, are relative, perspectival

accounts of reality. However, this Diltheyan construction is not how the concept is usually understood among Calvinist proponents of *worldview*. According to contemporary Christian philosopher David Naugle,[1] the Christian worldview is the antidote to the relativism entailed by the term in its native context. To quote Naugle:

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> *"Worldview" in Christian perspective implies the objective existence of the trinitarian God whose essential character establishes the moral order of the universe and whose word, wisdom, and law define and govern all aspects of created existence.* (italics in original)[2]

Worldview in this context includes deep ontological, epistemological, and ethical commitments. Clearly Naugle wants to claim more for the Christian faith than that it is *one among many* perspectival accounts of reality. In short, many Christian worldview proponents really want to do metaphysics. However, in using the language of *Weltanschauung,* they are tacitly associating religion with the failure of metaphysics, and using perspectival terminology when in fact they wish to make a stronger claim on behalf of their beliefs. Thus, worldview proponents within the Calvinist world tend to conflate worldviews and metaphysics, either developing contradictory definitions of *worldview* or equating worldviews with metaphysics. The latter is particularly problematic, as it associates religion with the failure of metaphysics and only compounds the skepticism with which much of religion is already regarded in the secular academy.

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[1]Naugle is a Baptist, but one who has been heavily influenced by Reformed theology. His understanding of *worldview* in particular is heavily indebted to the Reformed tradition. Therefore, I will refer to him as a Reformed thinker in what follows. However, some Reformed thinkers would make a distinction between Naugle's position, characterized as evangelical, and their own. Naugle does not make such distinctions and refers to a number of Reformed thinkers as evangelicals. Nevertheless, his position on *worldview* is solidly Reformed.

[2]David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 260.

Thirdly, characterizing religious beliefs and a religious approach to life as a *worldview* has the effect of damaging the epistemic status of religion. Calvinist worldview proponents have argued that Christianity should not be considered inimical to scholarship or other cultural pursuits and aspects of life. They persistently argue that the notion of *worldview* preserves a legitimate place for religion within intellectual and cultural discourse. However, being historically a relativistic construct, *worldview* has

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only saved a place for religion in a patronizing way. This is largely because *worldview* lends itself quite readily to the kind of postmodern hermeneutic that, while being skeptical of the ultimate epistemic status of various belief systems, still at least grants them an audience within the pluralistic cultural discourse. Nevertheless, any robust claim to 'knowledge' is eschewed. Thus, Christian proponents of *worldview*, while attempting to get away from the dualism between faith and knowledge, cannot seem to escape it. Perhaps this is because they have adopted a modernist concept, despite otherwise being highly critical of modernity and particularly modernist challenges to the Christian faith. The common thread running through each of these three criticisms is the propensity of Reformed scholars to make cognitive claims on behalf of their religious beliefs. *Worldview*, as a post-Kantian construct, frustrates this aim and is not conducive toward articulating a cognitive dimension of Christianity.

My observations may call for some qualification. I do not mean to say that *worldview* should be entirely dropped from the vernacular of Reformed scholarship. Perhaps it is a useful term to designate broadly one's pre-theoretical presuppositions and perspective on the world and our place in it. However, it should not be appropriated uncritically for the purposes of defending conservative Protestantism. Although criticisms against the concept have been raised by those within the Reformed community for many years and, to be fair, taken seriously by *worldview* proponents, its value as the primary intellectual vehicle for establishing the legitimacy of a Christian

perspective in culture and the academy has been vastly overestimated by its Reformed defenders. Through an examination of Calvinist scholarship affirming *worldview's* efficacy as a culturally relevant and intellectually sound apologetic, I hope to show that the above objections,

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which will be argued at length, have not been adequately addressed by foundational and contemporary *worldview* proponents. If successful, this exercise will cast a measure of doubt upon the reasonableness of resting the credibility of Christianity on the shoulders of the kind of *worldview* thinking currently popular in Reformed circles.

I remain unconvinced that excessive reliance upon the *worldview* concept is the best way to represent Christian faith even though it may secure a sympathetic hearing within a postmodern hermeneutical framework. My critical position regarding the Reformed use of *worldview* is defensible upon the basis of objections such as those outlined above and argued below. In what follows, I will argue that Reformed *worldview* proponents have not sufficiently grasped the philosophical roots and implications of the concept and have not exercised appropriate caution in adopting it.

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Chapter I: *Worldview* and Visualism

Worldview is employed in various ways within Christian[3] circles. James Sire defines worldviews as "universes fashioned by words and concepts that work together

[3]To avoid over generalization, I will be limiting my treatment to the broadly Calvinist tradition.

to provide a more or less coherent frame of reference for all thought and action."[4] A worldview can also be construed as "a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world."[5] In general, then, *worldview* is often used to denote a comprehensive web of foundational beliefs which informs one's interpretation of life and the world. *Worldviews* can be latent or held consciously and everyone possesses some worldview or other. This is an intentionally ambiguous provisional definition designed to accommodate at least the broad contours of what worldview proponents in the Christian world mean by the term. Often, something akin to this ambiguity is present in their literature on the subject.[6] Perhaps this is because when one attempts to clarify the meaning of the term, various tensions and problems arise, some of which are perhaps already implicit in the definitions offered thus far.

There is a considerable amount of ambiguity here relative to the popular and scholarly attention given to *worldview* within the Reformed community. For example, Sire's definitions are ambiguous as to whether *worldviews* are primarily systematic

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philosophical systems or pretheoretical commitments. This ambiguity is indicative of the fact that *worldview* is employed by neo-Calvinists in different ways for different purposes, further complicating any attempt to arrive at a precise definition. *Worldview* is sometimes used as a synonym for philosophy. Some authors give the impression that a worldview is a formally worked out system subject to the formal and informal rules of logic and inference. For example, Ronald Nash maintains that "World-view is a

[4]James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 16.

[5]Sire, 16.

[6]Sire has acknowledged this in a more recent publication *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004) written due to Sire's "own growing sense of dissatisfaction with the cursory way I have dealt with the concept of worldview. The definition in the first three editions of *The Universe next Door* now seems inadequate to me", 13.

conceptual scheme by which we consciously or unconsciously place or fit everything we believe and by which we interpret and judge reality. The philosophical systems of such thinkers as Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel were world-views."[7] In Reformed Christian usage, *worldview* has been adopted as a tool to defend the cogency of the faith. In relating the history of the worldview concept, Naugle proposes, I think correctly, that when the concept was appropriated by certain Christian thinkers in the nineteenth century, the most prominent being James Orr and Abraham Kuyper, it was employed for broadly apologetic purposes. *Worldview* was seen as a strategic concept for the defence of the coherent nature of the Christian faith, enabling it to become a competitor with modernity, Marxism, and Darwinism[8] which seemed to threaten religious orthodoxy. A brief look at Orr's *The Christian View of God and the World* or Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* suffices to confirm the apologetic intent of pioneering advocates of *worldview* in the Calvinist world. Consider the following salient quotations from these two works:

> The opposition which Christianity has to encounter is no longer confined to special doctrines or to points of supposed conflict with the natural

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> sciences,...but extends to the whole manner of conceiving the world and man's place in it....This circumstance necessitates an equal extension of the line of defence. It is the Christian view of things in general which is attacked, and it is by an exposition and vindication of the Christian view of things as a whole that the attack can most successfully be met.[9]

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[7]Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 24.
[8]Naugle, 6--24.
[9]James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, foreword by Vernon C. Grounds (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1989), 4.

> With such a coherent world and life-view, firmly resting on its principle and self-consistent in its splendid structure, Modernism now confronts Christianity; and against this deadly danger, ye, Christian, cannot successfully defend your sanctuary, but by placing in opposition to all this, a life- and world-view of your own, founded as firmly on the base of your own principle, wrought out with the same clearness and glittering in an equal logical consistency.[10]

These statements imply that a Christian worldview will be a formal, coherent, logical system of thought, rivalling other philosophical systems and ideologies. Naugle seems to implicitly endorse such a view. Thus *worldview* is often discussed as though it were primarily a theoretical construction arrived at through systematic intellectual activity.

However, there is another conception of *worldview*, arguably Dilthey's, and also arguably held by the Dutch Reformed philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd. A worldview

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belongs to Dooyeweerd's epistemic category of naive or pretheoretical knowledge.[11] Albert M. Wolters states, "A worldview is a matter of the shared everyday experience of humankind, an inescapable component of all human knowing, and as such it is non-scientific, or rather (since scientific knowing is always dependent on the intuitive knowing of our everyday experience) *prescientific* in nature. It belongs to an order of cognition more basic than that of science or theory."[12] In a similar vein, James Olthuis offers the following extensive definition of *worldview*:

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[10]Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism: Six Lectures Delivered at Princeton University under Auspices of the L.P. Stone Foundation*, 1931 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 189--90.
[11] Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1958), 3, 34, 41--42.
[12]Albert M.Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 9.

> A worldview (or vision of life) is a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it. This vision need not be fully articulated: it may be so internalized that it goes largely unquestioned; it may not be explicitly developed into a systematic conception of life; it may not be theoretically deepened into a philosophy; it may not even be codified into a creedal form; it may be greatly refined through cultural-historical development. Nevertheless, this vision is a channel for the ultimate beliefs which give direction and meaning to life. It is the integrative and interpretative framework by which order and disorder are judged; it is the standard by which reality is managed and pursued; it is the set of hinges on which all our everyday thinking and doing turns.[13]

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Given this usage, everybody has a worldview; philosophers are simply better at articulating their worldview than are others. *Worldview*, then, seems for these thinkers to be distinct from *philosophy*. One can, to be sure, philosophize on the basis of one's worldview, but *philosophy* and *worldview* are not to be identified. This distinction may be due to the consensus that philosophy, however one defines it, generally has to do with having an articulate, reasoned position on a subject, rather than an unarticulated pretheoretical belief.[14] In other words, while *philosophy* is a discipline, *worldview* is not. However, this view may be in tension with *worldview* construed as a formal

[13] James Olthuis, "On Worldviews," in *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science*. Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffioen, and Richard J. Mouw, eds. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 29.

[14] For Dooyeweerd, pretheoretical knowledge has its own epistemic ground. Nevertheless, this is distinct from *philosophy*, and the point stands. See Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought, Vol. I* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1958), 3, 34, 41--43.

system, "glittering in logical consistency." Perhaps some would argue that these two conceptions of worldview are not mutually exclusive; however, there is tension. The burden of proof is on Reformed worldview proponents to reconcile these two accounts and offer a consistent definition. Thus, *worldview* is certainly not an entirely consistent, tightly defined notion as employed by the community of contemporary Calvinist philosophers and theologians.[15] The term is in fact used quite variously throughout the popular and scholarly Calvinist literature on the subject. Perhaps we have not moved very far from the ambiguous and broad preliminary definition above. Nevertheless, I believe that there is enough detail here to proceed to delineate several reasons why *worldview* is not entirely serviceable for Christian purposes, notably securing a place for religion within the wider intellectual and cultural discourse.

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Other problematic features become evident when one looks at the expression *Christian worldview*[16] in particular. *Worldview* in ordinary language is not a technical term, and is usually used to designate broadly one's perspective on life and the world. Thus adding the adjective "Christian" may simply refer to a Christian's perspective concerning life and the world. For example, we might expect a person having a *Christian worldview* to believe that all things happen for a purpose according to the providence of God. This belief might be a Christian perspective on life and the world. One might alternatively call it a Christian interpretation of life and the world. 'Perspective' in this context implies little more than a particular point of view, an angle, a vantage point, or an opinion.[17] 'Interpretation', however, implies some kind of hermeneutical framework. This latter understanding is likely closer to what

[15]Some may find a fluid definition of worldview useful for accommodating a wide range of intellectual enterprises including philosophy and theology. However, in philosophy, a discipline which insists upon precision, *worldview* must be given a more precise definition.

[16]Again I am remaining within the Calvinist tradition's use of the term; there may well be other Christian worldviews, i.e., the *Catholic worldview*, which I do not address.

[17]However, worldview proponents usually want to make *cognitive* claims.

Christian worldview proponents wish to convey when they speak of the *Christian worldview*. It is not merely a vantage point *from* which to view the world, but a set of corrective lenses *through* which to view the world. The *Christian worldview* is a hermeneutical framework designed to correct a distorted vision of reality.

There may be a certain "loaded" quality to this particular use of *worldview*. There is a definite tension between the historical meaning of *Weltanschauung*, which implies subjectivity and perspectivism, and the Reformed tendency to absolutize a particular Christian worldview. It may also betray confusion between a theory designed to understand worldviews "scientifically" and particular worldviews. In Dilthey's terms, the former is a hermeneutical methodology for understanding the latter, which are subjective

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beliefs having relative truth value. There will be further development of these points below.

A related problem involves the aforementioned tendency to reify a vision of the world as the true and total view of the world.[18] One might suspect at this point that worldview construction of the kind Christian worldview proponents have in mind simply cannot be done. The *Christian worldview* for example, as represented by the broadly Calvinist tradition, while communally shared in many respects, does not escape particularity. That is to say, having a Christian worldview, even within the parameters of a certain tradition, does not dictate that all of the beliefs that one holds will coincide with those of the Christian worldview of one's neighbour. This lack of unanimity may be due to an inconsistency in one's beliefs, but this is not necessarily

[18] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann offer the following definition of *reification*: "Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly superhuman terms. Another way of saying this is that reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity as other than human products -- such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will." See Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966; Anchor Books, 1967), 88.

the case. Since *worldview* can be defined as "the comprehensive framework of one's basis beliefs about things" with "things" being "anything about which it is possible to have a belief"[19] it may not be possible to have a total worldview about such a comprehensive range of issues that is communally shared in its entirety and avoids particularity. One could perhaps be a nominalist with regard to worldviews, and such a position may be difficult to refute.[20] Therefore, to speak of the Christian worldview as a total system assumes too much unanimity among individuals, even within one's own tradition, to say nothing of other Christian worldviews held throughout church history. Thus, a worldview cannot escape

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particularity, and must remain a tentative construct, rather than a totalizing apprehension of the truth about life and the world. A *worldview*, Christian or otherwise, should be open to revision. A particular Christian worldview is not canon; it is a fluid theoretical construct.

It is also theologically questionable that one could ever possess such a totalizing Christian worldview. That would seem to be the sort of perspective that only God could have-- a "God's-eye-view," as it were. It may be that finite human beings must rest content with a particular worldview, which is admittedly limited and fallible. Given these considerations, the "Archimedean point" from which to construct such a grand Christian worldview would appear to recede. In the absence of a transcendent vantage point, one is left with the particular thinking subject. However, it will not do to construct the Christian worldview on this basis, for to claim that the thinking subject is the standard for truth is far too close to modernity for those of an orthodox persuasion. At this point, one might appeal to divine revelation for the contents of a

[19] Wolters, 2.

[20] I have in mind here something similar to Wilfred Cantwell Smith's understanding of nominalism with respect to religion. As the faith of individual Christians may not suggest the "Christian faith," perhaps the worldviews of individual Christians do not suggest the "Christian worldview."

comprehensive Christian worldview, although it is difficult to see how this is helpful unless one has a rather naive view of biblical hermeneutics. Otherwise, all of the attending problems of particularity and subjectivity still apply. These problems arise largely because *worldview* as a concept has its roots in a perspectival epistemology, at least at some level, as will be argued below.[21] Christian worldview proponents who have been cognizant of this history have attempted to cleanse the concept of these associations by "baptizing" it in Christian waters, as it were. In other words, they attempt to embed *worldview* in a new context and redefine it in various respects to avoid its perspectivism. In my judgement, this project has not been

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successful; either the implications of worldview's original perspectivism reappear, or the definition of *worldview* offered is confused, inconsistent, or conflated with metaphysics. In any case, problematic entailments result.

Thus far I have offered only preliminary criticisms. My first major criticism of the broadly apologetic use of *worldview* in Calvinist scholarship is that it is too reliant upon an epistemological visualism -- the systematic overemphasis of or reliance upon visual metaphors or analogies for rationality or knowledge.

Visualism and the Rise of Modernity

Christian proponents of *worldview* may either fail to grasp fully the importance of the visualist bias inherent in the concept or fail to take its implications for religion seriously enough. Epistemological visualism is not first instantiated in *worldview*. Rather, *worldview* is the culmination, though perhaps not the end, of a long tradition within Western philosophy of conceiving of knowledge by analogy with vision. Walter Ong contends that: "The history of philosophy itself has largely been the history of a search after more and more adequate visualist or spatialist analogies by which to

[21] This needs to be qualified. Dilthey, as I will argue, is not a naive epistemological relativist or historicist.

represent and deal with the real universe and the universe of the mind, but we are living in an age today which has begun to feel uneasy about this quest."[22] While Ong may overstate his point, I believe he has drawn attention to a neglected issue in the history of philosophy. This is not to imply that all or most of the great philosophers are empiricists; again, visualism should not be equated with empiricism. Rather, it is meant to suggest that among the great philosophers in the Western tradition, including prominent rationalists, there is the tendency to conceptualize knowledge in terms of sight and visual phenomena. This

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statement warrants further justification, and therefore, in what follows, without attempting to provide an exhaustive treatment of the history of philosophy, I will suggest, in respects relevant to our consideration of *worldview* in Calvinist thought, that certain aspects of Western philosophy do indeed exhibit this visualist tendency, and that this tendency finds its fullest expression in the concept of *worldview*. I will focus on figures of whom Reformed *worldview* advocates are generally critical and here it will be apparent that certain aspects of Western thought that Christian *worldview* advocates find particularly objectionable may well be grounded in the same visualist paradigm out of which the *worldview* concept itself emerges.

Although *worldview* and its German predecessor *Weltanschauung* are terms of relatively recent coinage, some Reformed scholars believe that one can detect latent worldviews among the ancient Greek philosophers. Given a sufficiently broad definition of *worldview* here, I would agree. An example of a conception of worldview among the ancients may underlie Protagoras' pronouncement that "Man is the measure of all things." Today, one might characterize such a worldview as "humanism" due to its anthropocentrism and secular, this-worldly orientation toward thinking about

[22] Walter Ong, *The Barbarian Within and Other Fugitive Essays and Studies* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 84.

reality. Therefore, already at this stage in history, one can see what might be called a *worldview*. In this context of sophistic skepticism, one can discern the connotations of perspectivism and relativism that the term *worldview* would acquire much later. The Sophists seem also to have had a notion similar to that of the "failure of metaphysics." The perspectivism of the Sophists is due at least partly to their tendency, as noted by Plato, to associate knowledge too closely with "appearances."

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One could argue that Greek philosophy as it came down to scholars in the West, especially through Plato, does not suffer from the visualism of the Sophists inasmuch as Plato contrasts opinion derived from appearances with true knowledge discovered via reason. Nevertheless, he does so by analogy of knowledge with sight and visual phenomena. Initial evidence for this interpretation includes the latter part of Book VI and early part of Book VII of the *Republic*. Here knowledge is understood by analogy with sight and intelligibility by analogy with light, and the sun represents the Good. Plato, despite affirming the unreliable nature of "appearances," still conceptualizes knowledge in terms of vision, albeit in a highly abstract way. Plato objects to the "appearances" insofar as they obscure true "seeing," namely knowledge of the Ideas.

José Ortega y Gasset writes, "Hence it is that, from the days of the Greeks, almost all terms pertaining to knowledge and its factors and objects are taken from ordinary words referring to seeing and looking. 'Idea' in Greek is the view that a thing presents, its aspect -- which in Latin comes in turn from *spec-*, to see, to look."[23] Ong, having done impressive research in this area, has compiled a lengthy list of English words used for cognition which are etymologically derived from classical languages.[24] Reflection upon these etymologies leaves little room for doubt that Plato and other

[23] José Ortega y Gasset, *Man and People*, Willard R. Trask, trans.(New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1957), 68.
[24] Walter Ong, *Interfaces of the Word* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 133.

ancient Greek philosophers did conceptualize noetic processes by analogy with sight and visual phenomena, sometimes extending terminology used to denote literal seeing to include, by abstraction, other aspects of knowledge. If this is the case, even Plato, though a rationalist, has visualist tendencies. And if Western philosophy is, as Whitehead has suggested, "footnotes to Plato," subsequent philosophers may have inherited what we

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might call "Greek visualism" and perpetuated this tendency to conceive knowledge and rationality in terms of sight.

Worldview proponents in the Reformed world are largely critical of Plato because of his alleged dualism, which they believe conflicts with the comprehensive scope of the *Christian worldview*. However, they are silent with respect to his visualism. Perhaps in Plato the implications of visualism for religion are not as conspicuous as they are in the thought of later philosophers, particularly those of the Enlightenment. Calvinist *worldview* proponents are also highly critical of the Enlightenment[25] but again seem to pass by its visualism, seemingly unaware that it may actually contribute in part to the aspects of modernity which they find objectionable. In what follows, I will briefly point out particular instances of visualism and how such visualism conflicts with Reformed *worldview* emphases. To the extent that visualism is the source of both objectionable aspects of modernity and *Weltanschauung*, perhaps Calvinist thinkers are arbitrary in their selective appropriation or rejection of modernist concepts.

Preliminary reasons for locating visualism in modern philosophy are cultural and technological. For example, Ong proposes that the advent of movable type and the spread of literacy facilitated the association of knowledge with the visualized,

[25]See for example, Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 117--129.

spatialized word rather than the spoken word as is the case in earlier cultures, such as that of ancient Greece. Print may have acted as a catalyst for conceiving of knowledge by analogy with sight to a greater extent than it had been previously and allowed latent visualist tendencies to flourish in philosophy and culture during the modern period. Philosophers of the modern period, both rationalists and empiricists, inherited this post-Gutenberg

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cultural milieu. And while it is a conventional view that they were preoccupied with epistemological concerns -- the rationalists and the empiricists usually being sharply demarcated on this score -- they were also engaged in a polymathic project encompassing religion, politics, culture, and the natural and social sciences. Here the methodological and epistemological differences between rationalists and empiricists are often overstated. The Cartesian emphasis upon clarity and distinctness, arguably visual metaphors, and the perspectivism of Spinoza's double aspect theory are both noteworthy points in this regard. Therefore, it will not suffice to assert that bona fide rationalists are immune to visualist tendencies. As I hope to show, both traditions, rationalism and empiricism, contain visualist elements, although these are admittedly easier to locate within empiricism.

None of the above observations are to deny or underestimate the affinity of rationalists, such as Descartes, for mathematics, deduction, and *a priori* reasoning. However, it can be argued that abstract thought is often conveyed via a visual medium, such as print. In particular, *reason* is often represented in the West through visual and spatial analogues, sometimes derived from typography. Marshall McLuhan notes that, "'Rational,' of course, has for the West long meant 'uniform and continuous and sequential.' In other words, we have confused reason with literacy, and rationalism with a single technology."[26] If McLuhan is correct, perhaps rationalism owes much to

[26] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 15.

visual media, and this may constitute preliminary grounds for suspecting it of visualism.

Furthermore, philosophical reflection upon the language of vision and its analogical transferability to intellection may explain, in part, why visualism would be

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particularly serviceable to certain aspects of the Enlightenment project. Sight is the most abstract of the senses, in that it requires the greatest distance between subject and object. In this way, it can serve as an analogue for abstraction and perhaps "critical distance." Distance is simply built into the act of seeing; to see is to distantiate. In like manner, as Ong proposes, "[O]ur intellectual knowledge is 'distancing': typically, though knowledge is union with what we know, to achieve fullest union, that is, understanding, we first distance what we want to know, manufacturing abstractions between it and us."[27] Ong offers further reflections upon how vision serves as an analogue for intellection:

> The drive to consider intellectual knowing, which at its term is understanding, by analogy with vision responds to the need to "formalize" intellectual knowledge, to give it definition, distinctness, edge, precision, clarity, qualities like those paramount in vision....intellectual knowing like vision is fragmenting: we need apartness. We come to tell *what* one thing is by cutting it off from other things--and "whatness" is the essence of our knowing. We know by putting together what we have taken apart: this is the essential movement in predication, in the judgment, which is two-membered, made up of subject and predicate, though its truth is one.[28]

[27] Ong, 138.
[28] Ong, 137--38.

Thus, visual analogies efficiently facilitate formalization, abstraction, and analysis. This point may shed light on how the broad scope of the Enlightenment project has affinities with visualism: the need to formalize many of the disciplines, differentiating them from

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natural philosophy, the value placed upon objective reason, and the penchant on the part of certain thinkers to abstract and analyse, are well served within a visualist paradigm for rationality and knowledge. As I will argue, such epistemological visualism is present in the thought of various modern philosophers.

Christian worldview advocates often interpret modernity as signalling the emergence of *homo autonomous* --the autonomous, rational man-- at least as an ideal.[29] This declaration of human autonomy is interpreted by *worldview* proponents as one of the primary features, perhaps the defining feature, of the *modern worldview*. Furthermore this emphasis upon the autonomy of human reason is interpreted as the outworking of the humanist impulse to replace God with the human knower as the final arbiter of truth. One may think here especially of the Cartesian project to establish the thinking subject as the standard of truth and certainty. Descartes also sought to repudiate tradition, take nothing upon authority, and admit of only 'clear and distinct' ideas. Descartes' methodology represents several aspects of modern thought which are contested from a Reformed worldview. However, it can be debated how much of this is due to an epistemological visualism. Cartesian metaphysics makes a distinction between thinking things (*res cogitans*) and extended things (*res extensa*). The objectification of the extended things is precisely the kind of formalization which constitutes a characteristic feature of the modern age and also seems to gain its purchase from the kind of visual phenomena which Ong discusses.

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[29] See Walsh and Middleton, 118.

This point is made in a different way by Martin Heidegger in "The Age of the World Picture,"[30] in which he argues that the essence of the modern age is man's redefinition of himself as the epicentre of being. According to Heidegger, with the advent of modernity, man becomes the ultimate subject, thereby alienating the rest of the world as objects of science. Heidegger points to Descartes as instrumental in bringing about this "age of the world picture." In setting up the human subject as the all-determinative knower, Descartes' legacy culminates in the "world picture" or *Weltbild*. By *Weltbild* Heidegger does not simply mean a perspective on the world, but the world conceived of as picture, or world as extended thing, or as object. Thus, the modern age is the age of humanism and also the age of worldviews. In contradistinction to how the term *worldview* has been used to denote merely a perspective on life and the world, Heidegger believes that worldviews emerge as attempts to position man as the supreme subject enabling him to master that which relates to him as object. Thus, according to Heidegger, the notion of *worldview* is a quintessential product of a thoroughly humanistic programme beginning with Descartes and continuing through Nietzsche. If this interpretation of the modern age as the age of worldview has any merit, Christian worldview proponents should note well that the concept they have chosen as a vehicle of the Christian faith may be the culmination of an aspect of modernity which they find particularly unsettling. It may well be that secularism, rather than religion, is best served by an emphasis upon worldview.

Heidegger also picks up on this theme and suggests that another essential feature of the modern age is "the loss of the gods":

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[30] Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, William Lovitt, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 115--54.

> The loss of the gods is a twofold process. On the one hand, the world picture is Christianized inasmuch as the cause of the world is posited as infinite, unconditional, absolute. On the other hand, Christendom transforms Christian doctrine into a world view (the Christian world view), and in that way makes itself modern and up to date. The loss of the gods is the situation of indecision regarding God and the gods. Christendom has the greatest share in bringing it about.[31]

Commenting, Naugle notes:

> The last of the two reasons is especially intriguing. Christianity, in an attempt to be modern by transforming itself into a worldview, has apparently violated its own nature, or forfeited something essential, and contributed to the contemporary uncertainty regarding deity. Thus it would seem as if "worldview," at least as Heidegger interprets it, is incompatible with traditional Christianity.[32]

Indeed, interpreted as the essence of modernity's humanistic autonomy of rationality and alienating objectivity, *worldview* may be incompatible with traditional Christianity as espoused by Reformed worldview proponents. A Christian worldview proponent need not consider this a fatal criticism, as a Christian thinker is not wedded to Heidegger's

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possibly idiosyncratic definition of *worldview*. However, an historical point remains: *worldview* emerges out of the modern project, which upon a Reformed interpretation, is itself based upon highly objectionable premises. In fact, Heidegger's account of the

[31] Heidegger, 116--17.
[32] Naugle, 140, n. 79.

primacy of the human subject as characteristic of the modern age is echoed by Reformed thinkers and the *homo autonomous* ideal is roundly rejected. One has to consider, then, that at least some aspects of modern philosophy considered particularly objectionable upon a Reformed interpretation, may result from some species of visualism. Inasmuch as *worldview* also emerges out of this visualist context, with its implications for secular humanism, it should be regarded by Reformed thinkers with a similar caution that characterizes their interpretation of the aforementioned aspects of modernity. The fact that it is not suggests at least a methodological, if not logical, inconsistency. To substantiate this judgement, let us continue to explore visualism in modern philosophy and its culmination in *Weltanschauung.*

The empiricist tradition also had some influence on the development of *Weltanschauung philosophie* through Kant's synthesis of rationalism and empiricism. As mentioned, visualism is perhaps more evident in the empiricist tradition. Despite John Dewey's criticism that empiricism is not empirical enough as it culminates in idealism and, ultimately, skepticism, one need not be a "radical empiricist" to be susceptible to visualism.[33] Dewey speaks disapprovingly of the "spectator theory of knowledge"[34] in which knowing is thought to be similar to the act of seeing. As mentioned, sight, in relation to our other senses, requires greatest distance from knower to known. This standing at a distance, aloof from the objects of our knowledge, is the ideal in the

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Western philosophical tradition. According to Dewey, it matters little which epistemological methodology one examines. Both rationalism and empiricism, in realist or idealist manifestations, require mental operations analogous to the act of seeing. We can know and be certain only when we have performed mental operations

[33] John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, Capricorn Books, 1960), 22--23.
[34] Dewey, 23.

that are like seeing in some relevant respects: such as being distantiated, analytic, clear, and precise.

One must bear in mind that visualism is not to be identified with any epistemological methodology; neither is visualism, strictly speaking, a formal epistemological methodology. Rather, visualism is a description that can apply to formal epistemological methodologies, both rationalism and empiricism, inasmuch as these methodologies disproportionately rely upon visual analogies with respect to rationality or knowledge. It is in this respect that empiricism, especially concerning *ideas*, relies heavily upon the language of vision. For example, John Locke compares the mind to a *tabula rasa*, something to be written upon by sensory experience, primarily sight. The association of the written word with knowledge in this context is, I believe, significant as it further reflects the observations of McLuhan and Ong in regard to the importance of typography as a cultural catalyst for more visually oriented ways of conceptualizing knowledge.

As we have seen, *idea* is related etymologically to *eidos* (to see, to look) and in its Greek philosophical context retains something of its visual connotations. However, the latent visualism of *idea* comes to the fore within modern empiricism as a clear example of a visual construct for knowledge. Locke's affinity for visual/spatial analogies for cognition is encapsulated succinctly in a passage from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Book II, chapter 11):

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> I pretend not to teach, but to inquire; and therefore cannot but confess here again, That external and internal Sensation are the only passages that I can find, of Knowledge, to the Understanding. These alone, so far as I can discover, are the Windows by which light is let into this *dark Room*. For methinks the *Understanding* is not much unlike a Closet wholly shut from

> light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible Resemblances, or *Ideas* of things without; would the Pictures coming into such a dark Room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the Understanding of a Man in reference to all Objects of sight, and the *Ideas* of them.[35]

Cognition, as we now know, is an extremely complex psychological activity; however, even without the benefit of our current scientific knowledge on the subject, one must suspect that the visualism explicit in Locke's account is overly reductionistic. One could press this critique further, but it suffices for present purposes to note that ocular analogies for knowledge are readily assimilated during this period. There are notable exceptions of course, such as Samuel Johnson's kicking of a stone in "refutation" of Berkeley. Perhaps this betrays a suspicion that our tactile sense is more reliable in some cases than our visual apparatus.[36] Nevertheless, visualism is a significant aspect of British empiricism, and such visualism may lead to skepticism regarding everyday knowledge.

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Kant sought to remedy skepticism and synthesize the sound elements rationalism and empiricism. The epistemological problems Kant addresses arise to some extent because he inherited from these two schools a visualist paradigm for knowledge. However, Kant implicitly recognized certain limitations of this model. A fundamental problem for Kant is whether we can know anything beyond phenomena, or appearances. (*Phainomenon*, "appearance," comes from *phainein*, "to show.")[37] As Kant may have realized, once one conceives of knowledge in primarily visual/spatial

[35] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* Peter Nidditch, ed. (Oxford University Press, 1975), 162--163.
[36] Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 169.
[37] Ong, 74.

terms, there arises the problem of how our knowledge about the world can ever apprehend anything other than appearances. Our visual field is limited to appearances in that it can only reveal surfaces. The interior of an object, the noumenon or thing-in-itself, is unattainable through sight. If knowledge is conceived of predominantly in terms of vision, it is necessarily limited to the phenomena. The noumena are inaccessible upon this visual/spatial model. Kant concludes that we can only have knowledge of the phenomenal world; the noumenal world is beyond our ken. This conclusion is arguably the result not only of the rationalist critique of empiricism but of the visualist legacy bequeathed to Kant by his predecessors. It is conceivable that the Kantian problem would not have arisen were it not for the success of visually-based conceptions for knowledge. Ong summarizes well:

> If understanding is conceived of by analogy with sight alone (which includes some inevitable admixtures of touch), rather than by analogy also with hearing (which reveals interiors, as will be seen), as well as with smell and taste,

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> understanding is ipso facto condemned to dealing with surfaces which have a "beyond" it can never attain to. As soon as one sets up the problem of intellectual knowing in terms of a visualist construct such as "phenomena," the question of "noumena" thus automatically arises. From this point of vantage, a basic question about Kantian philosophy would seem to be: How much of the problem Kant poses is really in the understanding or intellectual process itself and how much of it is in the model for understanding which the history of his culture made available to him?[38]

[38] Ong, 74.

To answer this critical question adequately would require closer engagement with the Kantian corpus than I can pursue here. However, given the tendency of modern thinkers toward visualism, it is plausible to infer that philosophy encountered epistemological problems directly related to this tendency. Therefore, this aspect of the Kantian project may have been one of the logical outworkings of the enthusiasm with which visualist models for epistemic processes were adopted during the modern period.

From a Reformed perspective, Kant's epistemological bifurcation of the world into the phenomenal and the noumenal presents a challenge to the epistemic status of religious statements. The consequence of Kant's critique is that what we call knowledge is restricted to sensory experience. We may believe in a realm beyond sensory experience -- with which religious discourse is chiefly concerned -- but we cannot claim to know anything, in any strict sense, about that which transcends our sensory experience. In this way, Kant contributes to a more liberal conception of religion than most Reformed

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worldview proponents would espouse. Those in liberal Christian circles have, in effect, adopted Kantian categories with respect to religious discourse, claiming only belief and rejecting traditional dogmatic theology. In Kantian terms, religious claims become matters of faith and private discourse rather than knowledge. Kant's epistemology effectively removes the epistemic status of religious claims. This is not to suggest that Kant is an enemy of religion. On the contrary, he believes that he must remove knowledge to make room for faith.[39] However, some in more orthodox camps, including the Reformed, believe there to be an irreducibly cognitive aspect to religious

[39] Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith, trans. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), Bxxx.

discourse. Clearly, Kant's diminution of knowledge to the sensible cannot accommodate the more traditional conceptions of revelation and theology that orthodox Christians wish to affirm. The Reformed thinkers referred to thus far do not want to abandon the claim to knowledge. Such knowledge may, in some cases, be pretheoretical, as Wolters proposes, but it is knowledge nonetheless.

Whether or not one is sympathetic to the project of expanding our conception of knowledge to include religious claims, one may see that appropriating *worldview* is not the best strategy for achieving this objective. The inherent visualism of *worldview,* and its perspectival implications to which I have alluded and will elaborate upon, are not conducive to defending the epistemic status, or cognitive dimension, of religious discourse. Inasmuch as this is one of the tasks of Reformed philosophy, *worldview* is ill chosen as a means of securing epistemic status for religious claims. In my judgement, a more promising tack to pursue would be to critique epistemological visualism in an effort to minimize the differences between religious and other sorts of claims. I will attempt to

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sketch such a response below in concluding this discussion of the connection between visualism and *worldview*.

At this juncture, we have considered one aspect of the duality within visualism namely, that it fosters rational objectification. Sight, given the physical distance required for its operation can serve as an analogy for "critical distance" and objectivity. However, a second dimension of visualism stands in an apparently paradoxical relation to the first, though it is also rooted in an aspect of our day-to-day visual experience. There is a perspectival aspect to our seeing that lends itself to a more relativistic interpretation of our knowing. If we each view the world from different angles, vantage points, and perspectives, then a certain perspectivism inevitably characterizes our purported knowledge. Along with Nietzsche, Wilhelm

Dilthey perhaps realized most fully the latent relativistic implications within visualism.

Dilthey and *Weltanschauung*

Although Kant rather than Dilthey coined the term *Weltanschauung,* [40] Dilthey imparted to it unique meaning and was the first philosopher to develop a systematic theory of worldviews. At the heart of Dilthey's worldview project is the attempt to arrive at objective historical and cultural knowledge-- to develop an epistemology for the human sciences, much as Kant had endeavoured to do for the natural sciences. However, he is also keenly aware of the failure of historically unsituated objectivity and the myriad of mutually exclusive metaphysical systems that have been generated in order to arrive at 'the Truth.' According to Dilthey, the history of metaphysics is the history of philosophical failure. The advent of historicism, associated with Hegel and Nietzsche,

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had essentially done away with dogmatic metaphysics, revealing instead that human beliefs are largely conditioned by historically and culturally contingent factors. Moreover, as Michael Ermath notes:

> After Kant's Copernican revolution, the problem of subjectivity and perspective became increasingly acute and enormously widespread in European thought. Indeed, it might be seen as the more or less explicit preoccupation of almost all thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If the mind is regarded as capable of knowing only what it considers according to its own prescribed plan, then there can be no pure "subject-less" knowing, a strictly objective apprehension of things as they

[40] Naugle, 58. *Weltanschauung* first appears in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, 1790.

> are in themselves. The outcome, as Dilthey observed, was "the subjectivity of the modern way of looking at things."[41]

Therefore, the rise of historical consciousness, coupled with the legacy of the Kantian revolution, called objectivity and the validity of metaphysics into question. In an effort to rise above this skepticism, Dilthey proposes his theory of worldviews. A worldview, in Diltheyan terms, is a comprehensive interpretation of life and the world. It is an overarching framework that enables one to deal with the vagaries of life. Thus, *Weltanschauung*, along with other cognate terms, is an extremely rich and nuanced concept as Dilthey employs it, and as such, it is beyond the scope of this current study to expound upon it in depth. However, it is important to note that for Dilthey, one's worldview is always in the process of formation and is constructed from the perspective

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of our individual consciousness. Which interpretation of life and the world that we adopt has everything to do with our perspective, which is necessarily relative to our historical and cultural experience. In a passage from his essay, "The Dream," Dilthey delineates this concept:

> This immeasurable, incomprehensible and unfathomable universe mirrors itself palpably in founders of religion, in poets and in philosophers. These all stand under the influence of time and space. Every world view is conditioned historically and therefore limited and relative....These types of world views exist alongside each other through the centuries....each world view expresses within its limitations one aspect of the universe. In this

[41] Michael Ermath, *Wilhelm Dilthey: The Critique of Historical Reason,* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 323.

> respect each is true. Each, however, is one-sided. To contemplate all the aspects in their totality is denied to us. We see the pure light of truth only in various broken rays.[42]

Here we encounter another problematic entailment of conceiving of knowledge by disproportionate reference to visual phenomena. As mentioned in regard to Kant, vision is limited to surfaces. In most cases, it cannot reveal interiors. It cannot go beyond the phenomena and arrive at the thing in itself. However, the reality is much more confining still, for sight cannot even reveal exteriors in their entirety, at least not at the same time. Even given a small, geometrically simple object, like a ping-pong ball, one cannot see the whole surface in its entirety at one glance. One is always looking from a particular angle,

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from one's own perspective; and this perspective is always limited. When these observations are translated into analogues for the way in which we see and conceive of the world, a perspectival account of worldviews inevitably emerges.

I say a "perspectival account of worldviews," in this context, rather than a perspectival epistemology, because contrary to some interpretations of his work, Dilthey is not an epistemological relativist, strictly speaking. Despite Dilthey's careful qualification of his position, many subsequent thinkers tended to interpret worldview thinking as a species of historicism. But as Ermath explains:

> It must be stressed strongly that the science of the world-views is not conducted on the same level as the world-views themselves. It is the

[42] Wilhelm Dilthey "The Dream," in *The Philosophy of History in Our Time: An Anthology.* Hans Meyerhoff, ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), 40-41.

> confusion of these two levels which has brought upon Dilthey the charges of unmitigated relativism and historicism.[43]

He continues:

> The world-views are indeed relative, but the positive knowledge of them is not relative in the same sense. Dilthey was very explicit on this point: "It is the task of the world-view doctrine...in opposition to all relativism to present the relation of the human mind to the mystery of the world and life." The methodical examination of the world-views is conducted on a plane which is

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> not simply immanent to the world-views themselves but partially transcendent to each of them.[44]

Therefore Dilthey sought to maintain a certain level of objectivity while avoiding the pitfalls of dogmatic metaphysics on the one hand, and unqualified skepticism on the other. Dilthey acknowledges the historically and culturally relative factors that invariably influence worldview formation, yet maintains that the student of worldviews can adopt a methodological stance which allows one to escape, at least partially, the hermeneutical circle. Thus in application to the religious worldview (one which Dilthey explicitly addresses)[45] one can study it, in its various cultural manifestations, as an historically and culturally relative phenomenon, albeit in possession of some genuine insights concerning the world. In other words, one can

[43] Ermath, 327.
[44] Ermath, 334--5.
[45] See H.A. Hodges, *Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. 1944), 93.

become self-conscious of the perspective from which oneself, and others holding various worldviews, see the world. *Weltanschauung* thinking was thus thought to be an important interpretative tool and was applied broadly across many disciplines including religious studies, sometimes more recklessly than Dilthey would have wished. Nevertheless, *worldview* thinking allows religion to be understood as historically and culturally relative. In such a context, one can no longer expect to arrive at a non-historically particular, transcendent account of reality. *Religion* conceived of as a robust pronouncement concerning the nature of reality had gone the way of classical metaphysics: it simply ceased to be a credible position with the advent of *Weltanschauung philosophie*.

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There is, I propose, a linkage between the perspectival aspect of visualism, *worldview* theory in particular, and Dilthey's "failure of metaphysics" thesis. This linkage has problematic entailments for those Reformed scholars who want to make non-perspectival claims on behalf of their own worldview. At this point, there is value in offering something of a corrective to the visualism of the *worldview* apologetic strategy undertaken in Reformed circles. Since what has been offered thus far is largely a negative critique, I propose some constructive suggestions that might be of use to Reformed scholarship.

A Critique of Visualism with Implications for Religious Claims

An epistemological critique of visualism consists of the recognition that visualism, when consistently and unconsciously employed in our epistemological models, can have problematic implications for knowledge, including what we might call "everyday knowledge."[46] One could argue that visualism not only threatens the epistemic status of religious claims but that of all knowledge claims that are non-

[46] This is Theodore Plantinga's terminology in *Christian Philosophy within Biblical Bounds* (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1991), 89--112.

theoretical or pretheoretical. This observation is related to the point made above in regard to Heidegger's understanding of modernity as the "age of the world picture" in which the thinking subject becomes distantiated and apprehends the world solely as an object of science. A consequence of this process is the humanistic spirit of "see for yourself"[47] in relation to purported knowledge claims. The humanist described by Heidegger is quite comfortable within the visualist paradigm, as it facilitates an autonomy with respect to our individual epistemic functions. Again, reflection on the language of vision can be of

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help here. Seeing, as opposed to say, hearing or smell, is a sensory experience over which we have a great deal of control. We can refuse to look at something we do not wish to see; we can close our eyes or avert our gaze. This control over our perception, which includes our ability to construct our visual field and to adopt a preferred perspective, is not as readily available in regard to other perceptual experience. Moreover, as we have noted, vision is the sense that requires the greatest distance for its proper functioning. When one translates this sort of language concerning vision into the way that we conceive of our epistemic processes, the "see for yourself" ethic with respect to knowledge emerges. Theodore Plantinga proposes:

> The Western ideal of objectivity as a virtue to be cultivated in the process of gaining knowledge is essentially an extension of this vision-based approach to knowledge. The knower must maintain a sovereign aloofness, an ability to shut reality out, so that it can be considered in the aloneness and privacy of thought. To know something is, first of all, to apprehend it

[47] Also Plantinga's terminology.

at a distance without being committed to it morally or entangled with it emotionally, and then to make something of it in "the mind's eye."[48]

A consequence of this line of reasoning is a foundationalist "ethics of belief" in the vein of W.K. Clifford who admonishes us that it is always wrong to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.[49] In other words, believe nothing you have not first "seen for yourself." This epistemological methodology has been criticized by those in the

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pragmatist tradition as getting in the way of practical, non-theoretical knowledge or what I have called "everyday knowledge." As mentioned, John Dewey in particular has spoken disapprovingly of the "spectator theory of knowledge."[50] I believe, for reasons that will be adduced shortly, that the pragmatists have detected a deficiency in visualist epistemic paradigms. In addition, however, Reformed scholars, including those who employ *worldview*, have devoted considerable attention to a critique of foundationalism. For example, Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff have developed an analytical approach to the critique of foundationalism concluding that it is ultimately self-defeating.[51] As mentioned above, Reformed scholars have no shortage of criticism for the Enlightenment, some of which can be accounted for as opposition to a foundationalist epistemological framework. Therefore, my critical comments on a "see for yourself" epistemological visualism are consistent with a project undertaken by a major school of contemporary Reformed scholarship.

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[48] Plantinga, 93.

[49] W.K. Clifford, *Lectures and Essays,* 2nd ed. Leslie Stephen and Frederick Pollock, eds. (London & New York: Macmillan and Company, 1886), 346.

[50] Dewey, 23.

[51] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1976); Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

An epistemological visualism which facilitates a "see for yourself" ethic in regard to knowledge severely limits, if it does not exclude, an epistemology of everyday knowledge. For example, one is not always in a position to "see" for oneself whether something is the case. Knowledge gathering is largely a collective enterprise mediated via language, and is often a matter of assembling testimony and using one's judgement to decide whether what one hears or reads is worth accepting as true. One would bear an unrealistic epistemological burden if he seriously insisted on "seeing" everything for himself. One should take into account the mediating role of language in all knowing. The "givens" of experience, visual or otherwise, are not strictly speaking known until they

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have been processed via judgement and mediated via language. Language, which is also a collective enterprise, plays no small role in the synthesis of our aggregate experience and the formulation of our knowledge claims. Therefore, knowledge is not primarily a matter of what one sees, whether literally or figuratively, but what one is justified in *saying* after reflection, digestion, and judgement. As Ong says: "We generate our certainties not in a solipsistic universe of isolated 'observation' but in a total context which includes verbalization in which we hope others will believe what we say."[52] When translating the language of vision into terms of intellection, which may have nothing to do with vision in any literal sense, one should note that the process of intellection is not properly a function of sensory experience. It is a function that has very little, if anything, to do with "seeing" even in a very abstract, analogical

[52] Ong, *Interfaces of the Word*, 125.

sense of the term.[53] Therefore, language located directly in our auditory experience, is indispensable to any adequate epistemological account.

More should be said here about the advantages to increasing our auditory analogies in our language about cognition. While "sight" fosters analysis, which is indispensable (although more useful for the purposes of criticism than construction) "hearing" arguably fosters a more synthetic, holistic approach to knowledge. While vision is fragmenting in nature with clarity, precision, and definition being paramount, hearing is less discriminating. Whereas vision requires much more by way of mental

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construction, hearing seems to have a ready-made synthesis.[54] Therefore, hearing may serve as a more apt analogy for certain noetic functions. Interestingly, some important concepts with respect to epistemology are aurally based. Examples include: category, judgement, logic, and dialectic.[55] This is not to say that visual analogies for rationality or knowledge should be replaced, or that we should use language based disproportionately on auditory analogies. Rather, the object is to achieve a balance, recognizing that the language of vision, while useful for shorthand purposes, is not always apt.

Reformed advocates of *worldview* seem to recognize implicitly that the visualism inherent in the term does not always best serve their purposes. For example, some speak of *worldview* as akin to a story, narrative, or semiotic construal.[56] While these terms do not entirely make up for the absence of auditory emphases, their use does seem to implicitly acknowledge that *worldview* in a Christian context has

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[53] Perhaps these observations help explain why philosophers usually do not attribute knowledge to other animals. Non-human animals typically have "experience" broadly construed. Indeed, many animals have sensory powers far more acute and sensitive than ours. However, so far as we can tell, they lack the capacity to rationally reflect and liguistically formulate the raw data of experience into justified true belief, or knowledge.

[54] Theodore Plantinga, 92.

[55] Ong, 134.

[56] Naugle, 291--303.

difficulty standing alone. Perhaps the reason involves the importance of hearing in the Christian revelation, especially upon a Calvinist interpretation. While Christianity does not require a faith that is completely "blind," there is a preference for auditory assimilation of knowledge, especially knowledge of a particular kind. Hearing is better than seeing at facilitating interpersonal knowledge. Vision cannot reveal interiors or truly "know" subjects without turning them into exteriors or objects. By contrast to vision, hearing can reveal interiors. One might tap an object and listen to determine if it is solid or hollow.[57] When we translate these aspects of sensory experience into language about cognition, we discover something we probably know intuitively: the auditory can reveal knowledge of subjects

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in a way the visual cannot. If knowledge is like sight, we could never have knowledge of subjects, a type of interior. We know other subjects primarily through language, located directly in sound. Knowledge of persons, an important aspect of our "everyday knowledge" would seem to be excluded under a consistent visualist paradigm for knowledge, in which formal knowledge is most similar to seeing. Therefore, hearing is more amenable to the knowledge necessary to foster communion with other subjects. And it is this aspect of knowledge with which the Christian revelation is most concerned. This relational, communicative, aurally-based approach to knowledge is in contrast with a distantiated "see for yourself" approach which self-consciously seeks to remain emotionally and morally disentangled from the object of its knowledge. In theological terms, revelation requires an active response on the part of the hearer. To know God is to enter into an "I-Thou"[58] relationship; the kind of knowledge facilitated by visualism is largely insufficient and irrelevant here. The *worldview* emphasis in Reformed scholarship, in both philosophy and theology, does not sufficiently grasp the

[57] Ong, 122.
[58] See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Ronald Gregor Smith, trans. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1953).

biblical preference for the auditory, upon a Calvinist interpretation, but rather translates religious language into a visualist epistemological framework.

This translating of religious language into *worldview* runs counter to Reformed philosophy's efforts to legitimize the epistemic status of religious language. The illegitimacy of "knowledge" with respect to religious claims is due partly to *worldview's* perspectival heritage and partly because *worldview* does not address itself to the kind of knowledge claims with which religious language is most concerned. There may be something of a category mistake concerning knowledge on the part of Reformed

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worldview proponents. In attempting to defend religion's claim to know certain propositions, due attention has not been paid to the nature of many religious statements. As I have endeavoured to show, there is more to knowledge than that which can be accommodated within visualist epistemological paradigms. Certain varieties of knowledge are better articulated via an emphasis upon our auditory and linguistic capacities. Perhaps, religious language, inasmuch as it claims knowledge of a particular sort, should be understood in the context of the interpersonal knowledge best facilitated on the basis of the aural. This is not to say that religious language is limited *only* to making claims of this nature.[59] There may be, upon consideration of religious language, other sorts of claims capable of being assessed by epistemological criteria. These would likely have to be assessed in terms of testimony and judgement (as is much of our "everyday knowledge"), although it is unlikely that such claims

[59] Christianity and the other major Western religious traditions affirm the significance of at least one particular, concrete event (i.e. the crucifixion of Jesus) which represents God's action in history. The affirmation of such an event may be construed as a knowledge claim; the historicity of the event itself could in principle be verified or falsified. However, it does not suffice to say that this would be a "fact" of our knowledge. What is being affirmed by the religious adherent is more than simply a fact; there is also interpretation going on, i.e. something inferred that may not be evident from the "fact" itself. Therefore, actually assessing the epistemic status of these claims which are, in principle, capable of epistemic status, becomes quite complicated.

would conform to the foundationalist criterion for knowledge common in a visualist orientation to epistemology; neither should we expect them to do so. Nevertheless, we must be content with more modest claims with respect to religious knowledge than some Reformed worldview advocates propose. However, a critique of epistemological visualism also entails that we might possibly make stronger claims with respect to religious knowledge than modernist critics would allow. This is no small victory from a Christian philosophical perspective.

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Chapter II: *Worldview* and Metaphysics

Although an epistemological critique of visualism may allow one to affirm a cognitive dimension to religious belief, one may still have to be content with more modest claims on behalf of religion than traditionalists are inclined to make. However, Reformed proponents of *worldview* are seldom content with making more modest claims on behalf of their worldview, and continue to make metaphysical pronouncements. Ironically, to this end, they have appealed to *worldview*, a concept which Dilthey associated with metaphysical failure. An approximation of Dilthey's definition of *metaphysics* would be the absolutization of a particular worldview which claims universal, scientific validity.[60] However, according to Dilthey, such validity is impossible due to the plurality of metaphysical systems and the absence of any methodology that might establish their validity. In this context, epistemology is the enemy of metaphysics because the former limits our knowledge, in significant respects, to the givens of experience. Since metaphysics inevitably ventures outside the givens of experience, it must be rejected by the modern epistemologist. One can still learn from metaphysics, as one can learn from worldviews, some facet of truth. However, a particular worldview must not be absolutized into a metaphysical system.

[60] Theodore Plantinga, *Historical Understanding in the Thought of Wilhelm Dilthey* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 81.

By contrast, proponents of the Reformed worldview, arguably do want to engage in metaphysics.

One might ask what is meant by this assertion. For example, some thinkers, both within the Christian camp and without, would disagree in principle at the prospect of Christian metaphysics. Heidegger denies the very possibility of Christian metaphysics:

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> Anyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth has the answer to the question "Why are there essents rather than nothing?" even before it is asked: everything that is, except God himself, has been created by Him. God himself, the increate creator, "is." One who holds to such faith can in a way participate in the asking of our question, but he cannot really question without ceasing to be a believer and taking all the consequences of such a step. He will only be able to act "as if".[61]

For Heidegger, then, the Christian faith precludes metaphysics. A Christian worldview would thus be anti-metaphysical upon this interpretation.

Even Dooyeweerd holds, perhaps somewhat inconsistently, that philosophy, including Christian philosophy, is not concerned with metaphysical questions which lie outside of our experience. Metaphysics, according to Dooyeweerd, invariably absolutizes something within temporal reality, which is incompatible with the supremacy of God within Christian theology.[62] Moreover, some Reformed worldview proponents are willing to admit, due to the empirical reality of a multiplicity of Christian worldviews, that their worldview is a fluid, non-absolute construct.[63] One

[61] Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Ralph Manheim, trans. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 7--8.
[62] Dooyeweerd, 13.
[63] Walsh and Middleton, 39.

may, then, question why I charge Reformed worldview proponents with engaging in metaphysics.

I do so mainly on the basis of statements made by Christian worldview proponents themselves. Sire has admitted that worldview analysis, in Christian terms, **PAGE 43** begins with metaphysical questions about fundamental reality, or ontology.[64] In this respect, Sire is a "premodernist" who seems somewhat nostalgic for the era of classical metaphysics before the epistemological shift in philosophy ushered in skepticism concerning metaphysics. Recall also Naugle's claim that *worldview*, cleansed of its relativistic implications in a Christian context, entails "*the objective existence of the trinitarian God whose essential character establishes the moral order of the universe and whose word, wisdom, and law define and govern all aspects of created existence."* [65] This statement is a metaphysical account in Diltheyan terms, namely the absolutization of a particular worldview. While later acknowledging the subjective aspects of *worldview*, Naugle nevertheless believes that the broad contours of the Christian worldview are universally true, rather than representing a limited, perspectival account of reality.

Moreover, while *worldview* may be malleable to some extent, in neo-Calvinist terms one's worldview should approximate divine revelation.[66] Therefore, inasmuch as a Christian worldview is biblical, informed and shaped by divine revelation, according to Reformed thinkers, it becomes a totalizing, comprehensive and true vision of reality. Again, the Christian worldview, inasmuch as it is grounded in revelation, is not merely a vantage point *from* which to view the world, but a set of corrective lenses *through* which to view the world. While other worldviews may be regarded as perspectival, perhaps having insight into some aspect of reality, the Christian

[64] Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 175--176, 226 n. 7.
[65] Naugle, 260.
[66] Walsh and Middleton, 39.

worldview is in a privileged position in that it does not stand in a perspectival relationship to all others. Thus, following these implications, the Christian worldview is not understood by proponents as

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a worldview itself, but a meta-worldview. In Diltheyan terms, such a hegemonic worldview is impossible. Worldviews cannot be *meta;* to recognize worldviews *qua* worldviews is to reject metaphysics. Thus, while Dilthey defines *metaphysics* in terms of worldview, neo-Calvinists define *worldview* in terms of metaphysics.

However, there are difficulties with conceiving of *Christian worldview* in terms of metaphysics.[67] Metaphysical systems are generally "totality systems," aiming to be complete and comprehensive in scope. Such totality systems maximize the kinds of claims one is justified in making about the constituents of reality. As such, totality systems do not take seriously the epistemological caution attending knowledge claims. Such systems are thus prone to elaborate ontologies which primarily appeal to *Reason* rather than experience for their legitimacy. By contrast, epistemology is inclined toward minimalism with respect to metaphysical pronouncements and Ockham's razor is applied to elaborate ontologies. A totality system, then, makes claims about reality in its alleged totality, often via elaborate ontologies that purport to deliver definitive answers to philosophical questions. As Theodore Plantinga says: "Metaphysics claims a monopoly on what there is to be said, or perhaps on certainty, for in its totalizing impulse, it leaves no area of reality or experience unexplored -- or so it says. Its alleged completeness somehow guarantees its truth."[68] Metaphysical systems are also mutually exclusive, absolute systems which claim "the Truth." In virtue of these factors, it is difficult to speak of metaphysical systems as being compatible with one another. Therefore, metaphysics as an absolutization of a particular worldview, is

[67] See Plantinga, *Christian Philosophy Within Biblical Bounds*, Chap. 6.
[68] Plantinga, 42.

generally closed, at least in principle, to insights from other worldviews or dimensions of experience or culture.

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Moreover, metaphysical systems, insofar as they are totality systems require us to go far beyond the givens of experience. In some respects, the Reformed interpretation of *worldview* is similarly totalizing and prone to metaphysical speculation. The world is not something of which one could have a "view" in any complete, comprehensive sense. As mentioned in regard to visualism and perpectivism, one cannot see objects, even small, geometrically simple ones, in their entirety at one glance. In this context, one could better speak about a perspective on the world, rather than a totalizing "worldview" which does not seem possible. Furthermore, a worldview of this kind is theologically questionable. Metaphysical completeness would seem to be something beyond our finite limitations as creatures; a "God's-eye-view" as it were, is not open to us. Nevertheless, metaphysical systems attempt to avoid perspectivism and attain an unsituated, comprehensive view of reality. Of course, Dilthey maintains that metaphysical systems are unsuccessful in escaping particularity; nevertheless, such claims to ahistorical universality were the defining features of premodern metaphysics.

However, in going beyond the confines of our experience, practitioners of premodern metaphysics have tended to overestimate the ability of reason to prove the universality of their claims. In this context, the Reformed impulse toward absolutizing a Christian worldview is an awkward fit with metaphysics in two significant respects. First, the consistent Reformed worldview proponent cannot place unreserved confidence in human rationality. All claims must be submitted to the authority of revelation, not to the bar of reason. Therefore, the claims of Reformed worldview proponents do not purport to be based exclusively or primarily upon reason, a non-

religious or at least non-religiously specific, criterion. In this regard, traditionalist Christians have criticized liberal Christians

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for minimizing traditional religious authorities and adopting secular, rationalistic criteria when assessing traditional Christian worldviews. In short, reason is not *particular* to a Christian worldview as is Scripture. Second, the claims of orthodoxy are allowed more metaphysical "space" in the absence of classical metaphysics. In significant respects, religious worldviews must reject metaphysics precisely for the latter's dogmatic inclinations which would seem to rule out religious discourse as non-philosophical or unscientific. Nevertheless, Reformed scholarship has cast *worldview* in totalizing terms, thereby making it look suspiciously like metaphysical accounts, the failure of which is, in Diltheyan terms, allegedly announced by *worldview*.

Employing *worldview* in a metaphysical sense corresponds again to the propensity of the above Reformed thinkers to make epistemic claims, of a metaphysical nature, on behalf of their particular worldview. This propensity to universalize and absolutize a worldview may have the effect of stultifying certain types of philosophical inquiry, and might be what Heidegger is articulating when he proposes that the Christian cannot truly ask the ultimate metaphysical question. If Reformed worldview proponents have proposed, as I have suggested, a meta-worldview in the cast of classical metaphysics, it is plausible that such a meta-worldview could become magisterial, a new "queen of the sciences" as it were. In the era of Christian metaphysics, theology fulfilled this role by disallowing, some would argue, certain philosophical questions to be asked, or at the very least, determining their answers. It is plausible that a Christian meta-worldview might also delimit philosophical inquiry. In this sense, a totalizing Christian worldview might be pre-metaphysical, in that it is the foundational presupposition on which philosophy must build. For Heidegger, *pre-metaphysical* and *anti-metaphysical* would be two sides

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of the same coin. While not specifically addressing *worldview* in this context, Heidegger proposes that "Christian philosophy" is a contradiction and a misunderstanding.[69] One can infer that the proper province of the Christian worldview is faith, taken up by theology (by which Heidegger seems to mean the phenomenology of religious experience). However, such a conception of *worldview* would lead to more liberal understandings of revelation and theology than those which Reformed, and other traditionalist Christians, espouse. Therefore, *worldview*, for apologetic purposes of defending the legitimacy of religion to make cognitive claims, takes on a "premodern" metaphysical manifestation within Reformed scholarship.

Collingwood's Absolute Presuppositions vis-à-vis Worldviews

It may help to approach the Reformed emphasis on *worldview* by reference to R.G. Collingwood's insights in *An Essay on Metaphysics*. Collingwood's project, at least in part, is to determine the proper subject matter of metaphysics, the legitimate object of the metaphysician's study. Collingwood contends that the etymology of *metaphysics* ("after physics") is not helpful here. He formulates two possible objects for a science of metaphysics. In this context, *science* is construed broadly, meaning a body of systematic or orderly thinking on a determinative subject matter.[70] If metaphysics is to be scientific, it must meet this criterion. Therefore, it is necessary to establish the determinative subject matter of metaphysics. The two candidates are "pure being" and "absolute presuppositions."[71] Collingwood argues that there can be no science of pure being, as there could be no peculiarities differentiating the subject matter of metaphysics from that

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[69] Heidegger, 7.
[70] R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, Rex Martin, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 4.
[71] Collingwood, 11.

of anything else, or indeed, from nothing at all.[72] Thus, one must distinguish metaphysics from "ontology" and practice the former without the latter. If metaphysics is not a science of pure being--such a thing is impossible--we are left with the study of absolute presuppositions.

According to Collingwood, the logical efficacy of absolute presuppositions (APs) lies not in their being true or false but only in their being supposed. Truth or falsity does not apply to APs, as it does to relative presuppositions,[73] in that APs form the context of a particular complex of questions and answers. There are no questions for which APs could possibly be the answers. Therefore, truth and falsity with respect to APs is inappropriate as APs are non-propositional. The task of the metaphysician is to identify APs and locate them historically. Thus, it is only true or false in a descriptive sense that particular people have held certain APs.[74] Collingwood also contends that APs usually "arise in the unconscious" and are held in a "constellation."[75]

Scholars have generally acknowledged affinities between constellations of APs and worldviews. A worldview is based on a constellation of presuppositions about the fundamental nature of the world and our place in it. Moreover, worldviews are often held unconsciously or preconsciously -- so implicitly that they are rarely articulated. In this way, worldviews form the framework, the basis on which one reasons and questions, without being questioned themselves. In addition, worldviews are pretheoretical or prescientific in that, like APs, they are the ground for the logic of question and answer, the presuppositions that make scientific inquiry possible. For Collingwood, whether APs

[72] Collingwood, 14.
[73] Collingwood defines a relative presupposition as "one which stands relatively to one question as its presupposition and relatively to another question as its answer." 29.
[74] Collingwood, Chap. VI.
[75] Collingwood, 66--67.

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make science, broadly construed, possible is a fundamental criterion in judging them right or wrong (again, not true or false) given the questions at hand. Likewise, worldviews can also be judged on the basis of their coherency, or whether they facilitate an orderly and systematic body of thinking about the world. Therefore, there are fundamental similarities between worldviews and APs; indeed, Collingwood is stating in an analytic way what Dilthey proposed phenomenologically.

In identifying the constellations of APs that constitute worldviews, metaphysics has a legitimate role, and it is here that I believe Reformed scholarship has pointed toward an important and valuable research project. Reformed scholarship, both philosophical and theological, has stressed the difference foundational presuppositions make to our interpretation of reality and, in turn, the manner in which we construct our worldviews. Those who hold radically different presuppositions are not going to interpret evidence or evaluate arguments in the same way. Thus, there is no presuppositionless position from which one can simply reason objectively and arrive at a value-neutral conclusion as some modernists would have it. Rather, at most we can hope to be aware of the presuppositions that we hold and reason self-consciously from such a vantage point. These considerations are, in part, reasons why the Reformed tradition rejects natural theology as an apologetic strategy. Such arguments simply will not be compelling to those whose absolute presuppositions do not align with the Christian theist's. Christian belief only makes sense within a total context, or worldview, of which certain presuppositions form the basis.

Metaphysics, in this context, would identify and study such presuppositions, and perhaps the presuppositions of other worldviews. Such an undertaking would not be akin

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to constructing a grand premodern metaphysical system, complete and dogmatic in its pronouncements. Rather, it would represent a systematic effort to understand the APs embodied in worldviews that form our interpretation of reality. Thus, metaphysics in Collingwood's sense quite naturally gives rise to hermeneutics. Collingwoodian metaphysics neither rehabilitates premodern metaphysics nor considers metaphysical statements to be meaningless as does logical positivism. Rather metaphysical statements are profoundly meaningful and play an indispensable role in how individuals and cultures frame ultimate questions and interpret their place in the world. In this respect, Collingwood's metaphysics resembles a hermeneutical approach rather than a system of logic. Whereas logical systems must work with propositions and truth values -- "the logic of question and answer"-- Collingwood's APs provide the context in which such logical systems find meaning. One can no more escape the necessity of APs than one can escape one's history, language, and culture all of which, from a hermeneutical perspective, significantly inform the way in which we frame "the logic of question and answer." Moreover, recognition of the hermeneutical dimension of all of thought, and the factors informing it, makes premodern metaphysics problematic. Hermeneutical considerations disallow, or at least render implausible, attempts to arrive at an absolute metaphysical system in premodern terms. Thus, Collingwood's conclusions may contribute to a hermeneutical understanding of the world. A hermeneutical metaphysics, then, would be legitimate in the context of Reformed worldview studies. Indeed, there is increasing interest in hermeneutics in Reformed scholarship. In my view, metaphysics in this sense is a worthwhile pursuit. However, one must be cautious not to use *metaphysics*

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equivocally, in the process averring to the premodern conception of a comprehensive account of reality -- a monopoly on truth.

In summary, Reformed scholarship needs to recognize the extent to which "premodernism" and *worldview* are in conflict. If one is attempting to reinvent premodern metaphysics, *worldview* is an ill-chosen term. Therefore, it is ironic that certain Reformed thinkers have so readily seized upon *worldview* as expressing a transcendent account of reality akin to those of ancient metaphysicians. In this context, Reformed Christianity is "premodern" despite sometimes being articulated as a *worldview*. Christian worldview proponents, such as Sire and Naugle, champion the importance of addressing metaphysical concerns such as the nature of reality, being, God, and other fundamental questions without the skepticism characteristic of much of post-Kantian, not to mention "postmodern," philosophy. As such, it is difficult to find common ground between Christian metaphysics and *Weltanschauung philosophie*. Whereas Greek and medieval Christian metaphysics -- which Reformed Christianity has inherited, albeit not without modification -- deals with universal questions of being and essence, *Weltanschauung philosophie*, developed as it was at the height of historical consciousness, deals with questions of historical particularity. While one is not doomed to historicism after this point in history, one must surrender the totalizing claims of metaphysics. If one is to rehabilitate metaphysics, I believe it would have to be along Collingwoodian lines or perhaps in terms of hermeneutics. Arguably, however, certain Christian worldview proponents are nostalgic for the days before modern epistemology drastically limited the knowledge claims we are justified in making, thereby rendering ontology -- or metaphysics as the study of pure being -- untenable. This situation does not

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necessarily rule out the possibility of cognitive claims on behalf of religion. On the contrary, by removing all totalizing metaphysical claims, the failure of metaphysics protects religion from the charge of irrationality by those whose dogmatic, mutually exclusive metaphysical systems might reject religion out of hand as "unscientific."

While the failure of metaphysics may yield an epistemological minimalism in regard to theology, in my judgement religious belief remains viable.

"Egyptian gold" and "Common grace"

I do not believe that Reformed worldview proponents have ever adequately resolved the above discussed tensions in their appropriation of *worldview*. This is not to say that thoughtful and reflective Reformed scholars have not addressed this tension in an attempt to render the Christian use of *worldview* less puzzling. Thus, in order to substantiate my above assertion that such responses are deficient in some way, I will conduct a brief investigation of the common strategies employed by *worldview* apologists in defence of their appropriation of *worldview* for the purposes of Christian metaphysics.

The Christian proponents of *worldview* mentioned above are not unaware of the relativistic implications of the term in its immediate context. The suggestion on the part of such thinkers is to avoid adopting *worldview* uncritically. William V. Rowe, for example, argues that *worldview* must be appropriated with due caution as it is not native to explicitly Christian intellectual territory.[76] Rowe proposes that *worldview*, as a migrant concept, is laden with certain philosophical baggage, some of which may have to be sought out and seized at the borders of Christendom. Against rejecting or appropriating the concept in its entirety, Rowe advocates transforming *worldview*, and commandeering

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it for Christian purposes. Therefore, it is not clear that *worldview* in Christian terms will necessarily retain its perspectival implications. However, to continue with Rowe's analogy, it is also possible that, despite his efforts, certain conceptual contraband from a Reformed perspective has already been smuggled inside the gates.

[76] William V. Rowe, "Society after the Subject, Philosophy after Worldview," in *Stained Glass,* 156.

Reformed proponents of *worldview* also look to precedents in church history in which a term, originally employed in a non-Christian intellectual and cultural context, has been successfully baptized for Christian use. For example, some of the church fathers make use of *philosophia* to communicate the Christian faith to their contemporaries. *Philosophia Christi* became a manner in which to articulate the gospel in the patristics' cultural and historical context. Moreover, not only is the term and concept *philosophia* borrowed from the Greek tradition, but the *content* of certain pagan philosophies is also freely used, regarded by Augustine as analogous to the Egyptian gold used by ancient Israel in the service of God. However, there are also limits to the "conversion" of pagan vocabulary and ideas. This is reflected in Christian philosophy as well. Dooyeweerd, for example, refused to use *substance* in any positive sense, judging it too laden with pagan philosophical content to be useful for Christian service.[77] The same issues surround *worldview*.

Naugle, in particular, favours Augustine's model for appropriating non-Christian philosophical material for Christian use. Naugle proposes that *worldview* is a valuable piece of "Egyptian gold" that should be transformed and exploited for Christian apologetic purposes.[78] However, even if Augustine's principle is sound, its application is notoriously difficult. For example, Augustine identifies the Platonists as those

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philosophers who have most fully grasped truths agreeable to the Christian revelation. In regard to the alleged insights of the Platonists, most Reformed scholars would differ with Augustine. Indeed, there has been a consensus in the Reformed intellectual community for some time that the Christian faith is in need of "de-Hellenization." Platonic influences are considered particularly suspect. Therefore, Augustine's analogy

[77] Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought, Vol. II*, 466--468.
[78] Naugle, 258--259.

and the underlying principle that there are philosophical treasures to be found among the pagans, does not specify a systematic method for mining and purifying these precious materials. It is not obvious then that various aspects of Platonism are valuable for Christian purposes. Neither is it obvious that *worldview* emerges as gold rather than dross when exposed to the refinement of scrutiny and criticism. Yet there is an additional though closely related rationale that is routinely marshalled by Reformed worldview proponents in support of appropriating *worldview* -- and non-Christian concepts more generally -- as a Christian philosophical resource.

Among the theological justifications appealed to in this context is the doctrine of "common grace." It is alleged that just as God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust," (Matt. 5:45) so God also showers truth upon believers and nonbelievers alike. Therefore, those who are not explicitly Christian, or perhaps even self-proclaimed unbelievers, are unknowing recipients of a general providence and as such may be in possession of some genuine insights which can be adopted by Christians. This "common grace" tradition has a long lineage also dating back to the patristics. Something akin to the doctrine of "common grace" is evident in Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana* in the passage concerning "Egyptian gold." However, there are several objections which can be brought against this "common grace"

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approach to the appropriation of non-Christian philosophical terminology and ideas.

First, it is debatable from an exegetical standpoint whether the passages of Scripture from which "common grace" is inferred in fact support such an interpretation. The biblical warrant for understanding "common grace" in the terms outlined above is precious thin. Implicit in the notion of "common grace" is a distinction between God's general providence and his "redemptive grace." However, in the passages most cited in support of "common grace" this distinction is not

apparent. In addition, such passages are often capable of a different interpretation that does not emphasize the aspects of "common grace" useful to Reformed worldview proponents. For example, Theodore Plantinga proposes:

> There is another important element in this doctrine of common grace, namely, that God *postpones judgment* on fallen, rebellious man. That postponement of judgment is part of the plan of redemption, of course, for without it, His will and plan for our salvation could not be realized. Once we understand this, we see why the term "common grace," which is usually contrasted with *particular* or *saving* grace, is not well chosen: the postponement, the lengthening and extension of the time during which man may go on living on God's good earth, enjoying both sunshine and rain, is by no means unrelated to His saving grace, His redemptive will and plan.[79]

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Thus, Christian Reformed thinkers need not understand the doctrine of "common grace" as a justification for utilizing philosophical terms and concepts that originated among nonbelievers.

Second, the application of the doctrine of "common grace" is usually applied rather selectively by those who defend appropriation of "Egyptian gold." For example, Reformed worldview proponents tend only to import concepts from the Western tradition. Here "Western" is not to be equated with "Christian" as the Western tradition antedates Christianity. Moreover, the Western tradition contains a good many self-consciously non-religious thinkers and ideologies. Nevertheless, if the doctrine of "common grace" is meant to articulate a universal or general revelation, one might

[79] Theodore Plantinga, 72--73.

expect to discover nuggets of truth, capable of conversion to Christian use, among the religions and philosophies of Asia. However, this possibility is seldom considered in orthodox Christian circles. Having outlined the affinities of certain Christian thinkers for Plato or Aristotle, Plantinga draws out the following implications:

> In our time we find Christians making similar suggestions about the great philosophers of ancient India: could one argue that the Buddha (570--477 B.C.) and Nagarjuna (second century A.D.), who are the two greatest philosophers of Buddhism, were used by God to prepare the way for the gospel in Asia? And would we want to assign similar status to Shankara (788--820), the greatest philosopher in the Hindu tradition? In orthodox circles such suggestions seem bizarre; in liberal Christian circles they get a respectful hearing. And when we turn to more recent Western philosophy, the common

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grace approach seems even less appealing. Many of the great philosophers of the last few centuries expressed themselves in explicitly anti-Christian (or perhaps "post-Christian") terms.[80]

It may be difficult for a Reformed worldview proponent to justify so selective an application of the doctrine of "common grace." Indeed, an approach to "common grace" and "Egyptian gold" that excludes Eastern traditions seems somewhat arbitrary. Here I think it is possible to see how such a doctrine (or belief, if "doctrine" is too strong) would be more amenable to a more liberal conception of Christianity than that espoused by a Reformed *worldview* apologist.

What I have said above stands in need of some qualification. I am not here arguing that there are no truths to be found outside the Christian tradition; indeed there

[80] Plantinga, 73--74.

are. Nor am I implying that it is never appropriate for Christian thinkers to incorporate non-Christian philosophical insights. Philosophy itself was originally a pagan rather than a Christian enterprise. By engaging in philosophy and studying its history, tools, and methods, Christians can certainly learn a great deal. I am arguing above that the proposed justifications appealed to by Reformed scholars for appropriating *worldview* and other concepts of non-Christian origin, do not provide a systematic methodology for discerning which terms and concepts are capable of "conversion" and which are not. Appeals to "Egyptian gold" and "common grace" may be quite arbitrary. Therefore, it may not suffice to appeal to such notions as adequate justification for appropriating *worldview*.

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This is especially true given what Reformed thinkers themselves acknowledge about the history and connotations of *Weltanschauung*.[81]

Perhaps some of the optimism arising in Reformed circles for the positive use of *worldview* also comes in some measure from theologian H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, which often resonates strongly within neo-Calvinist scholarship.[82] For example, both Naugle and Wolters reject, with Niebuhr, a paradigm which pits Christ against culture.[83] According to such thinkers, the Christian life is not to be conducted in a private, culturally isolated manner strictly demarcated from "secular" pursuits, but should be one of cultural engagement. In this paradigm, Christ is said to transform culture.

There is something to be said for the Niebuhrian approach, especially from a Reformed perspective. It allows room for the cultural mandate that has historically differentiated Calvinist theology from the more radical Reformational traditions, such

[81] Naugle, 256--257.

[82] See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951). See also, Walsh and Middleton, 101.

[83] Wolters is perhaps more explicit on this point than Naugle. See Wolters, 37--39.

as the Anabaptist. Mennonites, heirs to the Anabaptist tradition, have a much more limited appreciation of certain aspects of cultural engagement and far less optimism about the prospect of Christ transforming culture. However, one does not need to endorse the "Christ against culture" paradigm to be skeptical of the neo-Calvinist application of Niebuhr's paradigm. I say "the neo-Calvinist application of Niebuhr's paradigm" in this context because, upon Niebuhr's conception, *Christ* transforms culture. With some qualifications, I might entertain such a thesis, at least provisionally. However, such a thesis is quite abstract. In concrete application, what is usually claimed by neo-Calvinists is that Christianity, or *Christian worldview*, transforms culture. In my judgement, there is

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a *prima facie* lack of evidence that this particular thesis is true, as Western culture is now largely "post-Christian."

Does Christianity, or having a *Christian worldview* in a non-technical sense, transform the concept of *worldview* itself? Again, the above scholars are optimistic. However, there are inconsistencies here. As mentioned, Dooyeweerd rejects Christian use of *substance*, as the term is allegedly too heavily infused with pagan metaphysical content to be redeemed. Nevertheless, *substance* has for centuries held a prominent place in theology. The positive use of *substance* has even been codified in creedal form. Is it the case that Christianity transformed *substance* in any relevant sense? Dooyeweerd would likely answer in the negative and would not be optimistic about the prospects of such a transformation. A detailed answer to this question is, of course, beyond the scope of my project, however, I believe that most Christian theological borrowings of philosophical terminology, usually pagan in origin, do not significantly transform such terminology. On this point, most Reformed scholars would be in agreement. After all, one of their current projects is to de-Hellenize Christianity rather than transform and render serviceable Hellenic concepts. Reformed thinkers who are

optimistic about the prospects for the Christian transformation of *worldview* are not consistently optimistic with respect to other theological borrowings. This is ironic, given that the theological borrowings neo-Calvinists are most skeptical of, are those that are "premodern," and as such, stand a better chance of being amenable to Christian purposes than those that arise in a modern, post-Kantian context. I would suggest that this selective criticism of theological borrowings represents an inconsistency in the Reformed application of the "Christ transforms culture" paradigm.

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However, perhaps the rationale behind *worldview's* adoption by Reformed apologists is more strategic than philosophical or theological. By communicating the Christian faith in terms of worldview, Reformed thinkers have attempted to secure legitimacy for scholarly Christian perspectives in the academy at large. *Worldview*, for some Reformed thinkers, in addition to providing a framework for core beliefs and values, is also a potential vehicle for securing a fair hearing for the Christian worldview within academia. *Worldview*, as a useful conceptual scheme, is quite commonplace in the contemporary academy and influential intellectuals have generally acknowledged the importance of one's worldview in relation to academic work. Thus, many Reformed scholars sense an opportunity to champion Christian theism as a legitimate worldview in the "market place of ideas." Articulating Christian theism as a worldview is a project which many in the Reformed intellectual community regard as strategically useful for attaining intellectual respectability for traditionalist Christianity among various competing worldviews in secular academia. Moreover, casting Christian theism as a worldview, may be able to avoid the charges of religious sectarianism and denominationalism which have generally precluded the legitimacy of certain perspectives at secular institutions. In this context, religious perspectives would be no more sectarian than other competing worldviews. All worldviews would begin on a "level playing field" and be assessed according to their

merits, bearing in mind the fundamental presuppositions that inevitably influence one's rational evaluation of other worldviews. This strategic aspect of the Reformed worldview project warrants further elaboration.

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Chapter III: *Worldview* and Apology

The main impetus for the renewed interest in *worldview* in neo-Calvinist scholarship has been the perceived revaluation and subsequent qualification of Enlightenment objectivity within the secular academy. Until relatively recently, objectivity was assumed to be possible and desirable in scholarship. Scholars in the arts and social sciences were encouraged by the prevailing intellectual milieu to model the objectivity and methodologies of the so-called "hard sciences" such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry. However, the contemporary academy in the West is less characterized by the modern ideal of objectivity. Reformed scholars have alleged that there is an emerging consensus concerning the inevitability of worldviews in academia. Nevertheless, the entrenched ideals of the Enlightenment are not easily expunged. As Anthony J. Diekema states:

> The current consensus is that all thought is contextual and therefore value-laden. All presuppositions of such contextualized thought may be challenged. The absolute inevitability of worldview considerations in everything we think and do and say seems now to be quite universally accepted. Everyone seems to acknowledge that all scholarship takes place in the context of specific presuppositions, a definable social milieu, and an array of religious beliefs and commitments of the scholar. Yet there remains in the

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> academy the predominant objectivity-rationalistic model with its presuppositions and assumptions.[84]

While I believe Diekema may have overstated the case, his comments generally reflect the climate of opinion in contemporary Reformed scholarship. Upon this view, it is an opportune time to reintroduce Christian theism, conceived of as a worldview, to the academy at large.

From the above considerations, one can reasonably infer the Reformed position on the role of faith and scholarship in the academy and culture. Reformed thinkers who draw on the idea of *worldview* argue that since everybody has a worldview and engages in scholarship on the basis of deeply held pretheoretical commitments, there is no worldview neutral scholarship; the secularist, as well as the Christian, brings a particular worldview to her academic work and is informed by it to a significant extent. The Enlightenment expectation that value-neutral, non-contextualized reasoning can yield unanimous results, regardless of the presuppositions, beliefs, and commitments of the particular reasoning subject, is rejected by Diekema and like-minded Reformed worldview proponents. Nevertheless, radical postmodernism notwithstanding, Diekema affirms that the proper aim of individual academics and academic institutions is the pursuit of truth. How consistent his view is with the perspectivism inherent in *worldview* remains to be explored. However, worldview, Christian or otherwise, is considered by many Reformed scholars to be foundational and integral to the academic enterprise -- the expansion of knowledge and the pursuit of truth. As Diekema also says: "Cognition, or

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[84] Anthony J. Diekema, *Academic Freedom and Christian Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 48.

knowing, is now more commonly viewed as a human practice in which truth is seen as subjective, mediated, and contextual. Worldview makes a difference. Because all intellectual activity begins somewhere, with presuppositions and first principles, it is more honest and liberating to acknowledge and articulate one's worldview than to pretend it doesn't exist."[85] Therefore, according to Reformed thinkers, worldview analysis does not question the legitimacy of faith commitments within the academy, but encourages an open debate as to which worldviews should be regarded as legitimate platforms for academic inquiry.[86] On this issue, neo-Calvinists have proposed that the various views often gathered under the nebulous rubric of "secular humanism" have been the dominant worldviews in the academy for many years, and as such, secularism has become the "default position." Meanwhile, explicitly religious worldviews have been methodologically excluded on the basis of some of the Enlightenment or positivist assumptions mentioned above. The result is a perceived pressure in the secular academy to divorce particular religious commitments from the business of scholarship. For example, one is expected as a philosopher *qua* philosopher to demarcate between reason and faith, not allowing the latter to influence the former. This methodological exclusion of religious belief, according to Reformed thinking, should not be done, largely because it fails to acknowledge the legitimacy of worldviews and their influence on particular thinking subjects. It is mainly this kind of worldview analysis that has led to the formation of Christian universities in the Reformed tradition, which self-consciously seek to integrate faith and scholarship. Thus, the Reformed tradition seeks to use worldview to

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[85] Diekema, 47.

[86] See Roy Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). Also, Arthur Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987).

contest the methodological exclusion of religious perspectives in academia and secure a sympathetic hearing for traditional Christian theism.

The methodological exclusion of Christian worldview considerations from the secular academy has been perceived by many traditionalist Catholics and Protestants, including neo-Calvinists, as often being arbitrary or perhaps motivated by ideological commitments. However, there are various reasons offered on behalf of the secular academy for this exclusion. In this context, complex issues arise notably those involving sectarianism and academic freedom. While the issue of academic freedom in particular is worthy of a thesis in its own right, an interesting relationship emerges between the "worldview legitimacy" currently popular in Reformed circles and issues surrounding the definition and defence of academic freedom. Therefore the concept of academic freedom in tandem with "worldview legitimacy" plays an important role in the Reformed argument that a worldview, Christian or otherwise, should be considered integral rather than inimical to scholarship and that *worldview* preserves a place for Christian theism in the intellectual and cultural debate concerning the public role of religion. In order to assess and critique *worldview's* usage toward this end a very brief excursus on the concept *academic freedom* is necessary.

"Worldview Legitimacy" and Academic Freedom

The literature on *academic freedom* is vast and it is beyond the scope of this project to cover it adequately. However, while there is a consensus that academic freedom ought to be defended, there is generally less consensus as to precisely what the concept entails. Arriving at an acceptable definition is arguably complicated by the plurality of worldviews within the academy and the presence and influence of

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postmodern deconstructionism in certain academic contexts. Nevertheless, attempts have been made to disambiguate academic freedom for theoretical and practical purposes. For the most part, academic freedom is primarily defined as a negative

freedom, a freedom from constraint. Academics should be unfettered when pursuing their academic work without being subject to undue interference. Academic freedom grants individual academics and academic institutions security against interference both internal and external to the academy. Of course, this definition raises the question of legitimate constraints. Academic freedom clearly does not mean that "anything goes" in relation to what academics are permitted to say and write. Postmodernism notwithstanding, such radical relativism has not made inroads into the academy sufficient to overturn completely the ideals of modernity still embodied in academic institutions and organizations. Thus, a more measured approach to academic freedom is needed. Further complicating matters is the relation of academic freedom to tenure. One proposal understands academic freedom "not as job protection for life but as the freedom within the law for academic staff to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing individuals in jeopardy of losing their jobs."[87]

Some have understood academic freedom in legal terms as an extension of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan has stated:

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> [O]ur Nation is deeply committed to safeguarding academic freedom, which is of transcendent value to all of us and not merely to the teachers concerned. That freedom is therefore a special concern of the First Amendment, which does not tolerate laws that cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom....The classroom is peculiarly the "marketplace of ideas." The Nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which discovers truth "out of a

[87] *British Education Reform Bill Proposal*, 1987. Quoted in Diekema, 6.

multitude of tongues, (rather) than through any kind of authoritative selection."[88]

While this opinion seeks to establish freedom of speech as having particular importance in academic settings, it is possible, and some would say desirable, to distinguish academic freedom from the broader category "freedom of speech." Academic freedom, as such, has no specific legal or constitutional sanction and is particular to academics. Academic freedom "is a right granted only to teachers and scholars in the academy and by the academy. It is protected by long-standing custom and convention within the academy, not by laws and statutes."[89] Moreover, it may also be prudent for academic institutions to carefully distinguish academic freedom from more general categories such as freedom of speech.

Because of the particular import of freedom of speech in an academic context and the attending responsibilities of the educational and scholarly enterprise there may be reasons for specifying criteria for the responsible exercise of free speech within the academy. Currently, many universities have speech codes that specify which statements

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are appropriate within the academic context. The fears of university administrators and trustees concerning instances of "hate speech" that may harm certain individuals and groups and also damage the reputation of individual academics or institutions make regulations concerning academically appropriate speech prudent for colleges and universities. Academic freedom does not entail freedom from any kind of constraint; there are norms of "civility, credibility, knowledgability, pedagogical soundness, and similar qualifications"[90] which must be maintained. Defenders of academic freedom

[88] William Brennan, *United States v. Associated Press*, 1993. Quoted in Diekema, 126.
[89] Diekema, 8.
[90] Diekema, 130.

thus have a certain responsibility and must abide by criteria, not all of which are required for the exercise of free speech in a more general sense. Academic freedom arguably carries with it more constraint in this regard than freedom of speech.

These considerations about speech regulation within the academy may suggest the possibility of censorship or that such speech codes could be ideologically exploited to silence certain worldviews. While this is a potential danger, lack of such limits to academic freedom could arguably pose a greater danger to the freedom of academics to pursue their work without undue interference. While the academy must address the increasing pluralism on Western university campuses since roughly the 1960s, the radical relativism of much of postmodernity does not necessarily safeguard such pluralism, but may even militate against it. In reference to postmodernism, Diekema argues:

> Indeed, its orientation toward unbridled tolerance, and its attribution of equal value to all and any voices or ideas, can only lead to disorder and chaos. And, ironically, if its single most cherished value continues to be the pursuit of

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> power, any success in that pursuit would automatically demand intolerance of anything except a radically relativistic worldview. Its unbridled tolerance, in the context of power, would become rigid conformity. Indeed, any ultimate victory for this movement would mean chaos for the academy and death for academic freedom.[91]

Thus, postmodernism and an "anything goes" approach to academic freedom may have the potential for far greater ideological manipulation than insisting that certain

[91] Diekema, 124.

standards of evidence and responsibility be upheld. In this respect, one can distinguish Reformed acknowledgement of "worldview legitimacy" and pluralism from a radical deconstructionist stance.

However, there is a positive aspect to the concept of *academic freedom* inasmuch as it includes the right and responsibility to preserve and pursue knowledge, to disseminate and publish one's research and "test received wisdom and to put forward new and controversial or unpopular opinions." Academic freedom, whatever else it entails, would seem at least to include the ability to challenge prevailing orthodoxies and introduce divergent points of view into scholarly discourse, provided that they are rationally defensible. There is a sense, of course, in which these positive aspects of academic freedom are predicated upon the absence of undue interference and constraints. Nevertheless, these positive freedoms are likewise essential to the scholar's task, which includes the maintenance, pursuit, expansion, and dissemination of knowledge. However, these considerations in isolation do not further the "worldview legitimacy" proposal of

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Diekema and other Reformed apologists.[92] Several aspects of "worldview legitimacy" are problematic in relation to academic freedom, namely, whether various worldviews are merely believed rather than rationally defensible, and in the case of explicitly religious worldviews, whether such beliefs constitute *knowledge*. Therefore, to argue for "worldview legitimacy" and pluralism in the academy on the grounds of academic freedom requires that several key assumptions be identified and defined. The case for "worldview legitimacy" in Reformed terms cannot rest exclusively on an appeal to academic freedom unless much careful philosophical work is done. And historically,

[92] See also George M. Marsden, "Liberating Academic Freedom" *First Things* 88 (December 1998): 11--14.

the secular academy has adduced reasons for methodologically excluding Christian worldviews from serious consideration and participation in scholarship.

Again, one such charge is that the sectarianism of particular religious worldviews actually is a hindrance to academic freedom. For example, one might claim that academic freedom is necessarily a secular concept due to the role religion reserves for external authority. Therefore, endeavouring to engage in scholarship from the vantage point of a Christian worldview is in effect to give up a significant measure of freedom of inquiry. Traditionalist Christian worldviews, including the Reformed, include a number of non-negotiable beliefs which could preclude following new evidence and arguments wherever they lead. Although *worldview* can be conceived of as a malleable construct, even by traditionalist Christians, substantial worldview revision is difficult in practice. Thus, religious worldviews may be too sectarian for introduction into a pluralistic scholarly discourse and may not qualify as promoting academic freedom but rather may pose undue restrictions on academics and academic institutions. This charge may be

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particularly challenging to answer for Christian denominations within the Augustinian/Calvinist tradition which have historically grappled with the paradox between freedom and theological determinism. In any case, the relation between Christianity and academic freedom is complex.

Of course, this complex relation is a subset of the ambivalence attending Christianity's relationship with freedom more generally. There have undoubtedly been religionists whose interpretations of orthodoxy and orthopraxis have stifled freedom of thought and expression. Moreover, there continue to be conservative Christians who are unsympathetic toward opposing points of view and are characterized by severe sectarianism and, in some cases, anti-intellectualism. However, beyond such conservative sectarians, not to mention secular caricatures of them, there are other

aspects of traditional Protestantism which may provide grounds for academic freedom. There are many biblical sources for freedom in addition to paradoxical passages suggesting theological determinism. However, Reformed scholars would argue that such freedom is contextualized within a particular worldview. Diekema argues that a robust conception of academic freedom can be developed from within a Reformed worldview. In reference to Christian freedom Diekema says:

> In the Reformed tradition this concept has usually been put in the context of Christian service. Christian freedom is a freedom to serve the kingdom of Jesus Christ and to be free to do so in every area of human life. It is a responsible freedom, not one of license to do anything one pleases. It is a freedom anchored in a worldview. That worldview is anchored in the

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> Scriptures, and so Christian freedom can be defined as a worldview source of the professor's academic freedom.[93]

Thus the Reformed conception of freedom is also contextualized. It is not an unbridled autonomy that can be thought of in exclusively modernist or secular terms. It also stands in contradistinction to liberal Christian conceptions of freedom as freedom from authority due to modernist interpretations of Scripture, rejection of traditional dogmatic theology, suspicion of ecclesiastical authority, or optimism regarding the exercise of human reason. While I am unconvinced by Diekema's extension of "Christian freedom" to include academic freedom or to provide a "worldview source" for academic freedom, I do not think that Christian scholarship necessarily involves the instantiation of one sectarian stance or that it is not open to pluralism in principle and would thus militate against academic freedom. Although it is historically the case

[93] Diekema, 74.

that concern about academic freedom arose partly as a response to denominationalism and church sponsorship of academic institutions, it is now more often the case that an entrenched secularism poses a threat to academic freedom, especially that of Christian scholars. As Diekema argues:

> It is an often noted and undeniable fact that many of the leading universities of the world, both past and present, have flourished under church sponsorship and religious direction. It would be sheer stupidity to deny the high quality of scholarship that emanates from some of the major Catholic and other religiously affiliated colleges and universities around the world. Even to

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> suggest that these institutions cannot provide an environment in which sound academic freedom thrives is evidence of a narrow parochialism that is, in its own way, sectarian. Surely, those who wish to reject a religious sectarianism -- as indeed, they must -- should not embrace a secular sectarianism in its place -- as they usually do! While it once may have been true that religious dogmatism was the principal threat to academic freedom, it may now be the case that the academy's intolerance of religion is the greatest threat to that freedom.[94]

Despite possible overstatement, Diekema has made some shrewd observations.[95] The existence of religiously affiliated colleges and universities with reputations for sound

[94] Diekema, 48.

[95] Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the church sponsorship associated with Catholic universities which Diekema defends is not the model endorsed by Kuyper. The Free University (Amsterdam) was designed to be free from undue pressures external to the university, including the church. While the neo-Calvinist worldview was intended to inform scholarship, the institutional distinctness of the university and church was maintained. However, Diekema does make reference to this Kuyperian model in the Appendix, 160.

scholarship does not support secularist views which disqualify religious "worldviews" from scholarship. Since this is true of the Christian campus, Diekema among others seeks to argue for the legitimacy of Christian perspectives in the larger academy. Ironically, traditionalist Christians in this context are arguing for inclusion and a plurality of perspectives, whereas various secularists maintain exclusivity.

Much could be said in regard to issues surrounding the place religion reserves for external authority. The place of authority differs within Christianity and it is very difficult to specify a monolithic conception of the relation of Christian scholarship to religious authority that could be agreed upon by a majority of Christian scholars. However, in

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general terms, it is the case that orthodox Christians, including those in the Reformed tradition, recognize authorities, such as Scripture, that are not assumed by their secular counterparts. One of the characteristics that differentiates traditional Protestantism from liberal Protestantism is the retention of the authority of Scripture and adherence to creedal formulations or doctrines. Whereas liberal Protestantism has acquiesced in large measure to the modernist critique of traditional religion, opting for a theological minimalism and an ethical humanism, traditional Protestantism maintains the authoritative status of Scripture and, while acknowledging the fallibility of theological interpretations, accepts certain core beliefs as non-negotiable for the Christian.

These non-negotiable elements of orthodoxy could impede academic freedom as one who espouses such doctrines may be reluctant to follow new evidence and arguments to their conclusion if orthodoxy is thereby called into question. By contrast, it is alleged that the secularist, or for that matter the liberal religionist, is free to follow the dictates of reason. Although it has been the case historically that commitment to perceived religious orthodoxies has resulted in resistance to the implications of research in various fields, for those familiar with Christian scholarship, it is not

obvious that a scholar's commitment to Christian doctrine will act as a self-imposed restraint on her academic freedom or curtail the academic freedom of non-Christian scholars. Nor is it obvious that the secularist or liberal religionist does not hold fundamental beliefs that might function similarly to the non-negotiable tenets of the traditional religionist. Indeed, Reformed worldview proponents would argue that to claim that religious worldviews are rigidly committed to non-negotiables whereas secularism relies solely upon "worldview-neutral" reason fails to take seriously the role of worldview in evaluating arguments and evidence. What are

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compelling reasons for the secularist may not be compelling reasons for the Christian and vice versa. Indeed, secularists or liberal religionists may not hold their fundamental beliefs in tentative fashion but in conformity to a tacit orthodoxy of their own. Despite my criticisms of *worldview*, there is a sense in which pretheoretical commitments, or absolute presuppositions, influence the manner in which we reason and evaluate arguments and evidence. Thus, academic freedom must be vigilantly defended within each and every competing paradigm.

One could also defend "worldview legitimacy" by appeal to religious freedom in relation to academic freedom. Although religious freedom is also a vast subject on which much has been written, it may overlap significantly with academic freedom and worldview pluralism in the academy. Religious freedom, in important respects, is not limited to being free to do things directly associated with religion -- usually conceived of as part of the "private" domain in secular society -- but includes the ability to act on the basis of religious beliefs in various capacities. Religious freedom also includes the freedom to do things indirectly associated with religion, such as scholarship. There is recognition of this point outside Reformed circles. In regard to religious freedom, Jay Newman proposes:

> Moreover, a person who can act on the basis of the religious world-view she accepts is obviously much freer than a person who can act only on the basis of *some* religious commitment. To be able to do things associated with religion as such, and not to be determined to be a secularist, constitutes something that can reasonably be regarded as a primary form of religious freedom. But one

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> clearly enjoys *more* religious freedom to the extent that one has not been determined to act on the basis of a *particular* religious world-view, especially insofar as one finds that particular world-view to be unnacceptable....It is actually useful to distinguish *qualitatively* between freedom to do religious things and freedom to act on the basis of a specific religious world-view that one sincerely accepts.[96]

One could argue that the same principle applies to religious worldviews, orthodox or liberal, vis-à-vis secular ones Therefore, in the context of the academy, one might argue that religious freedom entails freedom not only to do that which is traditionally associated with religion but also to pursue scholarship from the vantage point of a religious worldview. There is an implicit relationship here between religious freedom and academic freedom. For example, one could argue that if a Christian worldview is methodologically excluded from scholarship -- if a scholar *qua* scholar is determined to be at least a methodological secularist -- she arguably enjoys less religious freedom than she could. She also would arguably enjoy less academic freedom if a Christian worldview is considered an illegitimate basis for scholarship. Notwithstanding the latter point, however, it would be curious if the secular academy, in the name of avoiding sectarianism and promoting academic freedom, limited religious freedom to

[96] Jay Newman, *On Religious Freedom* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1991), 20 -- 21.

those practices traditionally associated with religion and the "private" domain of life. Moreover, such an attitude may reflect a parochial preference for secular or religiously

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liberal conceptions of religion which regard it as primarily private and easily demarcated from other forms of intellectual and cultural expression.

Criticisms of the Contemporary Calvinist Apologetic

Although I am not entirely unsympathetic to the Reformed project outlined above regarding "worldview legitimacy," I remain skeptical concerning the efficacy of *worldview* as a vehicle for accomplishing the above aims. While Reformed apologists may get some mileage out of *worldview*, it is a concept that negatively impacts their efforts to secure legitimacy for traditional Christian theism within the academy. Having presented some philosophical criticisms of *worldview* above, my criticisms of the strategic use of *worldview* by Reformed apologists will be more methodological. Nevertheless, some of the criticisms concerning perspectivism and relativism will re-emerge.

As mentioned, Reformed apologists emphasize the importance of presuppositions in one's thinking. To some extent, this is legitimate; however, I believe that Reformed worldview advocates overstate the case in this regard. For example, Reformed apologists often speak as though all foundational assumptions are created equal. Upon this conception, there is no substantive difference between the methodological assumptions of, say, a rationalist -- one who believes in the efficacy of reason, broadly construed -- and those of the Christian theist. To quote Diekema once more:

> The predominant secular academy, I am sure, is more comfortable with the rationalistic approach and has managed to define academic freedom in

such a way that is congruent with the presuppositions of a totally rationalistic and

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objective model. It simply comes to a faith in reason. Thus, the argument that faith in reason, at base, is no different than faith in God must be aggressively pursued.[97]

I believe that Diekema, along with other Reformed apologists, has made an unwarranted inference here. First, there is very little by way of argument establishing that "faith" in reason is qualitatively similar to professing Christian theism. Such a claim is usually only asserted with a general appeal to presuppositions and worldview as justification. However, it is not obvious that a methodological assumption about the efficacy of reason is no different than faith in God. On the contrary, the latter seems to entail more robust commitments by way of metaphysics, theology, ethics, and so forth than the former. These points warrant further elaboration.

Reformed apologists, in their efforts to defend the importance of *worldview*, and the Christian worldview in particular, in shaping one's cognitive activity have tended to confuse worldviews with more modest methodological assumptions.[98] For example, Reformed thinkers often argue that if a rationalist is epistemically entitled -- justified in believing without explicit argumentation -- in the efficacy of reason as a tool for discovering truth, then the Christian is epistemically entitled to her basic assumptions about the fundamental nature of reality. Despite the ambiguity of the terminology, there is a difference between worldviews that may entail many beliefs,

[97] Diekema, 48 -- 49.

[98] Some of the contemporary Reformed thinkers cited above may inherit this tendency from Dooyeweerd. See L. Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy: An Introduction to Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought*, Bernard and Josina Zylstra, eds. (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1975), 57--58.

including a number of incomprehensible mysteries and dogmas, and the relatively modest belief that reason,

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broadly construed, is the best tool for apprehending truth. Although, such a belief in the efficacy of reason may be a presupposition, or at least relies upon a number of presuppositions or first principles, it is a "safe" one to make. While certain first principles may not be provable, the efficacy of reason, broadly construed, is well substantiated on the basis of reflection and experience. For example, one could cite the success of the scientific method -- often regarded as the best methodological tool for securing knowledge about the world -- in answering many questions and improving the quality of life in the industrialized world. Surely, belief in such a method does not, by itself, constitute a *worldview*.

However, some Reformed apologists, notably those emerging out of Cornelius Van Til's "presuppositionalist" school of apologetics, have argued that such a methodological assumption -- if indeed it is an assumption -- is not "safe" on the basis of worldviews other than Christian theism. They argue that a naturalist, who believes that the natural world constitutes the sum total of reality, is not justified in assuming the efficacy of reason or that rational categories apply to the world, as there is no justified prior expectation that the world should be intelligible and conform to such categories. Thus, the presuppositionalist would claim that worldview determines the assumptions that one is justified in making. However, Van Til's view has some serious shortcomings.

For example, even if a naturalist, on the basis of his worldview, has no reason to believe that the world will *necessarily* be intelligible, this belief may well emerge on the basis of experience. Moreover, the presuppositionalist stance seems to imply that the naturalist cannot actually know anything about the world. He may, by

accident, believe certain truths, but because his presuppositions are all wrong, in addition to having no

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basis for believing in the efficacy of reason, he will incorrectly evaluate or interpret arguments or evidence. However, this position strikes most as false on the basis of experience. Surely, the existence of non-theists who know various things, and come to acquire such knowledge in largely the same manner as Christian theists, constitutes a *reductio* of the assertion that one must ascribe to a Christian worldview in order to make certain assumptions and claim to know certain truths. In addition, such an approach contradicts the Reformed appeal to "common grace" which alleges that unbelievers do in fact have access to a general revelation, including natural reason, and can and do arrive at truths about the world. Furthermore, it does not suffice to merely assert that only a Christian worldview provides grounds for methodological assumptions, such as the efficacy of reason; such a claim requires philosophical argumentation. As there are naturalistic accounts of rationality and logic propounded by non-theistic philosophers, these would have to be carefully refuted and the claim of the presuppositionalist would need to be carefully argued.[99] However, such a project is not forthcoming from the presuppositionalist camp. For some of these reasons, Reformed scholarship has been moving away from such approaches, although some of the "presuppositionalist" language remains in the Reformed literature on *worldview*.

Therefore, to argue that worldview, with all of the various metaphysical, theological, and ethical beliefs that it may entail -- not to mention mysteries and dogmas -- is methodologically equivalent to the more modest belief in the efficacy of reason as a tool for apprehending truth appears to be wrong-headed. The Reformed

[99] Kelly James Clark, "A Reformed Epistemologist's Response," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven B. Cowan, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 259--261.

worldview proponent cannot simply assume an entire worldview as though it were a methodological

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assumption. To do so would be to gain by theft what should be gained through honest toil. In other words, such a strategy appears to avoid the hard work of actually having to defend the Christian worldview rationally.[100] This reluctance on the part of Reformed apologists to defend their views rationally may be indicative of another problem with the worldview strategy for securing a fair hearing for the Christian faith.[101]

This problem concerns the apparent inability of the Reformed apologist's argument to differentiate between worldviews that are rationally defensible and worldviews that are simply believed rather than worthy of belief. At this point the perspectivism of the worldview model returns with a vengeance. Since Reformed worldview apologists have relied upon a critique of modernist conceptions of reason, and have been reluctant to defend the Reformed worldview rationally lest they uncritically adopt modernist categories, they are left with an appeal to pretheoretical assumptions. However, such assumptions are not immune from rational scrutiny. Despite the nuancing of Enlightenment objectivity, we need a criterion -- such as being rationally defensible -- to differentiate worldviews that are worthy of belief from those that are not. The alternative is unmitigated perspectivism and relativism. Therefore, a scholar's pretheoretical assumptions should be rationally defensible. While one may well begin with pretheoretical assumptions, it does not follow that one should end there. However, Reformed apologists, while offering various articulations of their worldview, do not often rationally defend the pretheoretical assumptions that they

[100] Clark, 261.

[101] There are exceptions to this rule, of course. Alvin Plantinga, for example, has offered rigorous, rational defences of Christian theism. Interestingly, Plantinga uses an analytical approach that is not invested in the efficacy of *worldview*.

hold. Undoubtedly, articulation of tacit worldviews is an important first step for rational scrutiny, but it is not the last.

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Given the latent perspectivism of *worldview*, however, it is difficult to avoid begging the question with respect to criteria for evaluating the legitimacy of different worldviews. Nevertheless, there are worldviews that are clearly not legitimate platforms for academic inquiry. One could think here of the worldview of flat-earth proponents or New Age spiritualists. These eccentric views are less than rationally defensible; however, the Reformed position on "worldview legitimacy" may not have the resources to properly exclude such views from the scholarly discourse. Given their critique of the rationalistic, objectivist model of modernity, Reformed apologists have been reluctant to specify criteria for differentiating between worldviews that are simply believed and those that are worthy of belief and serious academic consideration. Consequently, Reformed thinkers have not provided good reason to believe that their worldview differs from other perspectival accounts of reality.[102] Perhaps this reluctance to offer a rational defence of the Reformed worldview is why some Reformed apologists have banked so heavily upon the influence of postmodernism and have, in my judgement, overestimated its impact in the academy at least in the Anglo-American context. Although Reformed thinkers would distance themselves from postmodernism in many respects and denounce its antinomian tendency toward "absolute relativism," its skepticism concerning the efficacy of autonomous reason to lead to objectivity is capitalized on by Reformed thinkers whose particular conception of *worldview* depends upon a critique of modernity.[103]

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[102] For acknowledgement of this point from within the Reformed camp, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1987), 352. Also, George Mavrodes, "Jerusalem and Athens," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 197--198.

[103] John M. Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven B. Cowan, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 227.

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Reformed Scholarship, "Postmodernism" and Worldview Revision

The relation between the Reformed "worldview legitimacy" project and the various intellectual and cultural forces gathered under the rubric of "postmodernism" is an interesting one. On the one hand, Reformed apologists view the unfettered relativism of postmodernism as a danger to the cognitive truth claims of the Christian revelation and as a potential cultural impediment to the acceptance of their message. On the other hand, Reformed apologists have attempted to capitalize upon the culture of openness that grants any and all perspectives a hearing within the pluralistic cultural and intellectual discourse. This is thought to be an environment in which a Christian worldview can be successfully promulgated. Thus, the Reformed worldview proponent's strategy is to use *worldview* as an apologetic tool in the postmodern context. Several criticisms can be brought to bear on this strategy.

Neo-Calvinists have overestimated the impact of postmodernism in the academy, and especially its influence on philosophy in Anglophone institutions. Diekema, for one, recognizes that though postmodernism has made inroads in certain academic circles, and even the culture at large, naturalism and rationalistic-objectivist models remain firmly entrenched as the main challenges that traditional Christian theism, having not yielded to the modernist critique of orthodox religion, must address. However, given the opposition to modernist categories and concepts, ironically with the exception of *worldview*, Reformed scholars, with a few notable exceptions, have been reluctant to develop a cogent defence of Christian theism on rational grounds. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the value of some of the Reformed critiques of modernity and epistemological foundationalism, such as those of Alvin Plantinga, which have rendered

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Christian theism more defensible even in contexts where the Anglo-American, analytical tradition in philosophy prevails. However, this remains a minority project among Reformed scholars. The majority, in my judgement, have misdirected their attention on an apologetic designed to function in the climate of postmodernity. Whether such an apologetic is successful at persuading postmodernists that Christianity is worthy of serious consideration remains to be seen. Although *worldview* is a flexible concept, with many meanings and permutations, there are limits to its usage imposed by the history of the concept. In particular, it is doubtful whether *worldview* will suit neo-Calvinist purposes, even assuming a greater postmodern influence in philosophical circles.

The appeal to *worldview* has undesirable consequences within postmodern contexts for two opposed reasons. First, *worldview* lends itself quite readily to the kind of postmodern hermeneutic that, while being skeptical of the ultimate epistemic status of various belief systems, still at least grants them an audience within the pluralistic cultural discourse. Nevertheless, any claim to "knowledge" or "truth" is eschewed. This may not pose a problem for more liberal Christians, particularly those content that faith is non-propositional, but it is damaging to the cognitive claims conservative Reformed thinkers wish to make on behalf of their worldview.

Second, despite its perspectival implications, *worldview* is still a modernist construct. Worldviews presuppose on some level a coherent, rational account of the world. While competing worldviews do not necessarily function as metaphysical frameworks, they do function on some level as meta-narrative frameworks, overarching schema designed to approximate reality. Those influenced by the postmodern critique are prepared to consider various perspectives, but they are extremely suspicious once it is

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revealed that the Christian worldview functions as a meta-narrative framework. Reliance upon meta-narratives is the very thinking postmodernists criticize. So long as worldview functions in a perspectival manner it will gain a hearing. But this modest use of worldview will not suffice for neo-Calvinist purposes -- namely, the promulgation of a faith that claims divine revelation. However, this stronger claim is viewed with suspicion. Therefore, in either case, the worldview strategy for securing legitimacy for traditional Christianity in the "marketplace of ideas" is not as persuasive as Reformed apologists allege.

Recognition of this second point is present in Naugle's recent contribution to *worldview* theory. In relation to *worldview* and postmodernism he states:

> In the postmodern period, confidence in humanity as an objective, omnicompetent knower has been smashed, destroying any hopes of ascertaining the truth about the universe, its facts or its values. The result has been what Jean-François Lyotard has famously called an "incredulity toward meta-narratives," or to paraphrase, a disbelief that any worldview or large-scale interpretation of reality is true and ought to be believed and promulgated....The resultant pluralism *in extremis*, as [Sander] Griffioen, [Richard] Mouw, and [Paul] Marshall explain, has led to the advent of a postworldview era. "Such stark pluralism can no longer be described as a *Streit der Weltanschauungen* [conflict of worldviews], for worldviews can conflict only if they compete as [rational] accounts of the same 'world.' In the extreme pluralism of ... [postmodernity], there is no single 'world' -- there are

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> as many worlds as there are worldviews. It is possible...that we are now on the threshold of the end of the age of worldviews."[104]

Unwilling to surrender *worldview* to postmodern relativism, Naugle implies that postmodernity's rejection of *worldview*, as an example of unmitigated relativism, is susceptible to the recoil argument. He asks, "Is not the postmodern denial of the cogency of any worldview itself a worldview, and therefore self-defeating?"[105] Perhaps it is the culmination of the perspectivism inherent in the *Weltanschauung* concept. Devoid of the "scientific" nuances of Dilthey's theory, *worldview* has lost whatever modernist, rational content it had and only a radicalized perspectivism has survived. If this is indeed the case among postmodernists, and if they have secured as much influence in the academy and culture as Reformed apologists have estimated, then perhaps *worldview* is an ill-chosen vessel for communicating and defending the Christian faith as a meta-narrative framework. As mentioned above, although in theory worldview has perspectival implications, it can be commandeered for the purposes of metaphysics, becoming a totality system which absolutizes claims to truth. Indeed, Kuyper among others, has argued that worldview in Christian terms can have a transcendent quality; it need not entail historicism. Christianity on this account emerges as a meta-narrative. This strategy of Kuyper was perhaps valuable in carving out a place for the Christian faith among the other major intellectual and cultural options as something to be taken seriously, thereby removing it from an exclusively "private" context. However, in the postmodern atmosphere of radical pluralism and belief in the perspectival nature of all belief systems,

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[104] Naugle, 174.
[105] Naugle, 186.

casting Christianity in terms of worldview may well be counterproductive in that it has the effect of relativizing religion and reinforces the "private" view of religion rejected by Kuyper and his neo-Calvinist successors. Since Reformed scholarship has largely utilized *worldview* as expressing a metaphysical, meta-narrative framework -- of which the postmodern period is suspicious -- it is questionable how valuable *worldview* is to Reformed apologists. One wonders if the Reformed intellectual community has succeeded in convincing any converts on the basis of the worldview apologetic.

Another aspect of the Reformed use of *worldview* that could potentially be problematic from a modernist or postmodernist perspective is the rigidity of *worldview* in a neo-Calvinist context. Although *worldview* is a malleable concept and some Reformed scholars have admitted the fallibility of any human interpretation of reality, or alleged revelation, there is a tendency to cast orthodoxy in terms of one's own worldview or that of one's tradition. The rigidity of the neo-Calvinist worldview is problematic because it makes any substantial revision of one's worldview due to new intellectual or cultural considerations very difficult if not impossible without a radical "paradigm shift." Of course, worldview revision may be difficult psychologically for anyone, religious or secularist, who has formed foundational beliefs and has lived one's life on the basis of some worldview. Nevertheless, it is worth asking under which conditions worldview revision is necessary in the interests of intellectual honesty.

Perhaps one might propose coherency as a fundamental criterion for assessing the merits of a particular worldview. However, it is questionable how useful such a criterion would be in terms of revising one's worldview. There are very few problems so intractable to individual worldviews that cannot, with some measure of creativity, be

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rendered coherent, albeit with tension in some cases. Historically, a case can be made that worldviews are very resilient structures that often resist change, and are usually overthrown on a cultural scale only long after every attempt has been made to salvage them. Worldviews function as plausibility structures that, in perhaps simplistic fashion, allow one to order the world according to categories that make sense and enable one to have a "comprehensive" vision of reality. Worldviews are, in many respects, humanity's reaction to the complexity and "messiness" of the world and an attempt to bring order and purpose and meaning. Thus, worldviews are not easily revised as they are comprised of absolute presuppositions that, at some level of consciousness, human beings are steadfastly committed to believing. Moreover, when it comes to religious worldviews, which make allowances for the presence of mysteries, paradoxes, and beliefs transcendent to human reason, coherency is a debatable, question-begging and ambiguous criterion to bring to bear. Thus, while there is going to be some measure of coherency in every worldview, it is doubtful that this criterion alone will be a decisive factor in worldview revision.

Plausibility is perhaps another criterion that one might consider in worldview revision. If a worldview ceases to be plausible given what we know, or think we know, about the world it ought to be at least heavily revised if not abandoned. However, plausibility as such is a notoriously person-relative criterion. What one finds plausible or implausible has much to do with the absolute presuppositions one already holds, and thus plausibility is more likely to be measured in terms of worldviews than vice versa. Moreover, coherency is compatible with implausibility, at least upon some interpretations of "plausibility."

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Nevertheless, I think that in order to secure "worldview legitimacy" one's worldview should be revisable at least in principle. In the case of the Christian Reformed worldview, it should be distinguished from orthodoxy or dogmatic theology.

One might speak here of an epistemic minimalism or fallibilism with respect to worldview. To continue a theme touched upon above, Reformed thinkers must be content to say less with respect to knowledge on behalf of their worldview than they have traditionally. Otherwise, worldview becomes too metaphysical in the premodern sense, and is in danger of becoming too magisterial, informing disciplines in hegemonic fashion, but not being informed by them. Such an approach is not only problematic in theory as argued above, but has obvious practical implications for the academy. A magisterially hegemonic worldview -- as various absolutized worldviews, religious and secularist, can become -- poses a threat to academic freedom and may preclude in principle worldview revision in response to new intellectual and even cultural developments which may warrant such change.

On the basis of the above conclusions, I believe that the "worldview legitimacy" strategy of Reformed apologists would benefit if the criteria or conditions constituting "worldview legitimacy" were specified. The above reflections on some of the problematic entailments of the "worldview legitimacy" project, however, suggest possible solutions. Thus, I would propose the following criteria that each worldview must meet before being given serious consideration as a legitimate platform for academic inquiry. First, such a worldview must be rationally defensible. This is not to say that it be widely agreed upon or popular, but that, given a chance, its rational merits can be defended adequately according to commonly accepted standards of evidence and

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argument. Second, worldviews should not confuse methodological assumptions with more complex systems of belief that warrant much more by way of argumentation. In other words, worldviews are not justified simply by virtue that they are assumed or that they are articulations of certain tacit pretheoretical commitments. Third, worldviews should be open to revision in principle and should avoid hegemony.

Fourth, worldviews should avoid as far as possible rigid sectarianism and allow for academic freedom. Nevertheless, the problematic entailments of *worldview* itself must be squarely addressed. Reformed apologists, in my judgement, have some legitimate aims; however, I fear these will ultimately be frustrated if *worldview* is taken uncritically as the primary intellectual and cultural vehicle for communicating Christian theism as a viable competitor to secularist philosophies.

In conclusion, the Reformed, neo-Calvinist use of *worldview* as a broadly apologetic tool is ultimately fraught with difficulties and fails in important respects. This failure is due in large measure to an appropriation of a modernist concept that is in direct tension with the claims of traditionalist Christianity. The visualism and perspectivism, and attending relativism and historicism, inherent in *worldview* are not easily expunged. The use of *worldview* does not preserve the cognitive aspect of religion that Reformed apologists defend. Indeed, it diminishes the claims of traditionalist Christianity which lays claim to truth. Therefore, Christian worldviews are invariably conflated with premodern metaphysics. Rather than aiding the project of establishing Christianity as a credible, coherent belief system rivalling other intellectual and cultural competitors, *worldview* undermines it. I conclude, then, that it is very difficult to distance *worldview*

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from its history. There are limits to the conversion and baptism of non-Christian terms and concepts.

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