

## TRUTH, CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY, AND THE POSTMODERN TURN

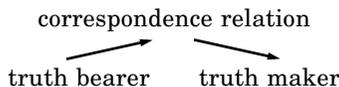
J.P. MORELAND\*

It is difficult to think of a topic of greater concern than the nature of truth. Indeed, truth and the knowledge thereof are the very rails upon which people ought to live their lives. And over the centuries, the classic correspondence theory of truth has outlived most of its critics. But these are postmodern times, or so we are often told, and the classic model, once ensconced deeply in the Western psyche, must now be replaced by a neo-pragmatist or some other anti-realist model of truth, at least for those concerned with the rampant victimization raging all around us. Thus, “we hold these truths to be self evident” now reads “our socially constructed selves arbitrarily agree that certain chunks of language are to be esteemed in our linguistic community.” Something has gone wrong here, and paraphrasing the words of *Mad* magazine’s Alfred E. Newman, “We came, we saw, and we conked out!”

The astute listener will have already picked up that I am an unrepentant correspondence advocate who eschews the various anti-realist views of truth. In what follows I shall weigh in on the topic first, by sketching out the correspondence theory and the postmodern rejection of it, and second, by identifying five confusions of which I believe postmodern revisionists are guilty. I shall close by warning that not only are postmodern views of truth and knowledge confused, but postmodernism is an immoral and cowardly viewpoint that people who love truth and knowledge, especially disciples of the Lord Jesus, should do everything they can to heal.

### I. WHAT IS THE CORRESPONDENCE THEORY OF TRUTH?

In its simplest form, the correspondence theory of truth says that a proposition is true just in case it corresponds to reality, when what it asserts to be the case is the case. More generally, truth obtains when a truth bearer stands in an appropriate correspondence relation to a truth maker:



\* J. P. Moreland, professor of philosophy of religion at Biola University, 13800 Biola Avenue, La Mirada, CA 90639, delivered this plenary address at the 56th annual meeting of the ETS on November 18, 2004 in San Antonio, TX.

Certain clarifications are called for. First, what is the truth bearer? The thing that is either true or false is not a sentence, statement or other piece of language, but a proposition. A proposition is, minimally, the content of a sentence. For example, "It is raining" and "Es regnet" are two different sentences that express the same proposition. A sentence is a linguistic object consisting in a sense perceptible string of markings formed according to a culturally arbitrary set of syntactical rules, a grammatically well-formed string of spoken or written scratchings/sounds. Sentences are true just in case they express a true proposition or content. We will return to the topic of propositions later.

What about truth makers? What is it that makes a proposition true? The best answer is facts. A fact is some real, that is, obtaining state of affairs in the world, for example, grass's being green, an electron's having negative charge, God's being all-loving. For present purposes, this identification of the truth maker will do, but the account would need to be filled out to incorporate future states of affairs that will obtain or counterfactual states of affairs that would have obtained given such and such. Returning to present purposes, consider the proposition that *grass is green*. This proposition is true just in case a specific fact, viz., grass's being green, actually obtains in the real world. If Sally has the thought that *grass is green*, the specific state of affairs (grass actually being green) "makes" the propositional content of her thought true just in case the state of affairs actually is the way the proposition represents it to be. Grass's being green makes Sally's thought true even if Sally is blind and cannot tell whether or not it is true, and even if Sally does not believe the thought. Reality makes thoughts true or false. A thought is not made true by someone believing it or by someone being able to determine whether or not it is true. Put differently, evidence allows one to tell whether or not a thought is true, but the relevant fact is what makes it true. It goes without saying that "makes" in "a fact makes a proposition true" is not causal, but rather, is a substitution instance of "in virtue of"—the proposition is true in virtue of the fact.

Our study of truth bearers has already taken us into the topic of the correspondence relation. Correspondence is a two-placed relation between a proposition and a relevant fact that is its intentional object. A two-placed relation, such as "larger than," is one that requires two things (say, a desk and a book) before it holds. Similarly, the truth relation of correspondence holds between two things—a relevant fact and a proposition—just in case the fact matches, conforms to, corresponds with the proposition.

## II. WHY BELIEVE THE CORRESPONDENCE THEORY?

What reasons can be given for accepting the correspondence theory of truth? Many are available, but the simplest is the descriptive argument. The descriptive argument focuses on a careful description and presentation of specific cases of coming to experience truth to see what can be learned from them about truth itself. As an example, consider the case of Joe and Frank. While in his office, Joe receives a call from the university bookstore

that a specific book he had ordered—Richard Swinburne’s *The Evolution of the Soul*—has arrived and is waiting for him. At this point, a new mental state occurs in Joe’s mind—the thought that Swinburne’s *The Evolution of the Soul* is in the bookstore.

Now Joe, being aware of the content of the thought, becomes aware of two things closely related to it: the nature of the thought’s intentional object (Swinburne’s book being in the bookstore) and certain verification steps that would help him to determine the truth of the thought. For example, he knows that it would be irrelevant for verifying the thought to go swimming in the Pacific Ocean. Rather, he knows that he must take a series of steps that will bring him to a specific building and look in certain places for Swinburne’s book in the university bookstore.

So Joe starts out for the bookstore, all the while being guided by the proposition *that Swinburne’s The Evolution of the Soul is in the bookstore*. Along the way, his friend Frank joins him, though Joe does not tell Frank where he is going or why. They arrive at the store and both see Swinburne’s book there. At that moment, Joe and Frank simultaneously have a certain sensory experience of seeing Swinburne’s book *The Evolution of the Soul*. But Joe has a second experience not possessed by Frank. Joe experiences that his thought matches and corresponds with an actual state of affairs. He is able to compare his thought with its intentional object and “see,” be directly aware of, the truth of the thought. In this case, Joe actually experiences the correspondence relation itself and truth itself becomes an object of his awareness. “Truth” is ostensibly defined by this relation Joe experiences.

### III. POSTMODERNISM AND TRUTH

Postmodernism is a loose coalition of diverse thinkers from several different academic disciplines, so it is difficult to characterize postmodernism in a way that would be fair to this diversity. Still, it is possible to provide a fairly accurate characterization of postmodernism in general, since its friends and foes understand it well enough to debate its strengths and weaknesses.<sup>1</sup>

As a philosophical standpoint, postmodernism is primarily a reinterpretation of what knowledge is and what counts as knowledge. More broadly, it represents a form of cultural relativism about such things as reality, truth, reason, value, linguistic meaning, the self, and other notions. On a postmodernist view, there is no such thing as objective reality, truth, value, reason, and so forth. All these are social constructions, creations of linguistic practices, and as such are relative not to individuals, but to social groups that share a narrative.

<sup>1</sup> For a helpful introduction to postmodernism, see Joseph Natoli, *A Primer to Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). See also J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003) chapter 6; Garrett DeWeese and J. P. Moreland, “The Premature Report of Foundationalism’s Demise,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Evangelical Accommodation in a Post-Theological Era* (ed. Justin Taylor, Millard Erickson, and Paul Kjos Helseth; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005) 81–105.

Postmodernism denies the correspondence theory, claiming that truth is simply a contingent creation of language which expresses customs, emotions, and values embedded in a community's linguistic practices. For the postmodernist, if one claims to have the truth in the correspondence sense, this assertion is a power move that victimizes those judged not to have the truth.

#### IV. FIVE CONFUSIONS THAT PLAGUE POSTMODERNISM

According to Brian McLaren, making absolute truth claims becomes problematic in the postmodern context. Says McLaren, "I think that most Christians grossly misunderstand the philosophical baggage associated with terms like *absolute* or *objective* (linked to foundationalism and the myth of neutrality). . . . Similarly, arguments that pit absolutism versus relativism, and objectivism versus subjectivism, prove meaningless or absurd to postmodern people . . ."<sup>2</sup> McLaren not only correctly identifies some central postmodern confusions, but his statement indicates that he exhibits some of the confusions himself. Let us try to unpack some of the philosophical baggage to which McLaren refers and bring some clarity to the confusion.

1. *Metaphysical vs. epistemic notions of absolute truth.* The first postmodern confusion involves metaphysical vs. epistemic notions of absolute truth. In the metaphysical and correct sense, absolute truth is the same thing as objective truth. On this view, people discover truth, they do not create it, and a claim is made true or false in some way or another by reality itself, totally independently of whether the claim is accepted by anyone. Moreover, an absolute truth conforms to the three fundamental laws of logic, which are themselves absolute truths. According to objectivism, a commitment to the absolute truth of some proposition P entails no thesis about a knowing subject's epistemic situation regarding P.

By contrast with the metaphysical notion, postmodernists claim that a commitment to absolute truth is rooted in Cartesian anxiety and its need for absolute certainty and, accordingly, claim that acceptance of the absolute truth of P entails acceptance of the conjunction of P's truth in the objective sense and the possibility of a (finite) knowing subject having Cartesian certainty with respect to P. Thus, one postmodernist recently opined that commitment to objective truth and the correspondence theory is merely ". . . an epistemic project [that] is funded by 'Cartesian anxiety,' a product of methodological doubt . . ."<sup>3</sup>

As I have already pointed out, this claim is entirely false philosophically. Advocates of a correspondence theory of objective truth take the view to be a realist metaphysical thesis and they steadfastly reject all attempts to epistemologize the view. Moreover, historically, it is incredible to assert that the

<sup>2</sup> Brian McLaren, "Emergent Evangelism," *Christianity Today* 48/11 (November 2004) 42-43.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Kennison, "There's No Such Thing As Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing, Too," in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (ed. Timothy Philips and Dennis Okholm; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995) 157.

great Western thinkers from Aristotle up to Descartes—correspondence advocates all—had any concern whatever about truth and Cartesian anxiety. The great correspondence advocate Aristotle was hardly in a Cartesian quandary when he wisely pointed out that in the search for truth, one ought not expect a greater degree of epistemic strength than is appropriate to the subject matter, a degree of strength that varies from topic to topic. The correspondence theory was not born when Descartes came out of his stove, and postmodernists lose credibility when they pretend otherwise.

2. *Two confusions about epistemic objectivity.* Postmodernists also reject the notion that rationality is objective on the grounds that no one approaches life in a totally objective way without bias. Thus, objectivity is impossible, and observations, beliefs, and entire narratives are theory-laden. There is no neutral standpoint from which to approach the world. Therefore, observations, beliefs, and so forth are perspectival constructions that reflect the viewpoint implicit in one's own web of beliefs. For example, Stanley Grenz claims that postmodernism rejects the alleged modernist view of reason which ". . . entails a claim to dispassionate knowledge, a person's ability to view reality not as a conditioned participant but as an unconditioned observer—to peer at the world from a vantage point outside the flux of history."<sup>4</sup>

Regarding knowledge, postmodernists believe that there is no point of view from which one can define knowledge itself without begging the question in favor of one's own view. "Knowledge" is a construction of one's social, linguistic structures, not a justified, truthful representation of reality by one's mental states. For example, knowledge amounts to what is deemed to be appropriate according to the professional certification practices of various professional associations. As such, knowledge is a construction that expresses the social, linguistic structures of those associations, nothing more, nothing less.

These postmodernist claims represent some very deep confusions about the notion of objectivity. As a first step toward clearing away this confusion, we need to draw a distinction between psychological and rational objectivity. It is clear from the quote above that Grenz's confused understanding of objectivity is at least partly rooted in his mistaken conflation of these two senses. Psychological objectivity is detachment, the absence of bias, a lack of commitment either way on a topic.

Do people ever have psychological objectivity? Yes, they do, typically, in areas in which they have no interest or about which they know little or nothing. Note carefully two things about psychological objectivity. For one thing, it is not necessarily a virtue. It is if one has not thought deeply about an issue and has no convictions regarding it. But as one develops thoughtful, intelligent convictions about a topic, it would be wrong to remain "unbiased," that is, uncommitted regarding it. Otherwise, what role would study and evidence play in the development of a one's approach to life? Should one remain "unbiased" that cancer is a disease, that rape is wrong, that the NT

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993) 15.

was written in the first century, that there is design in the universe, if one has discovered good reasons for each belief? No, one should not.

What is more, while it is possible to be psychologically objective in some cases, most people are not psychologically objective regarding the vast majority of the things they believe. In these cases, it is crucial to observe that a lack of psychological objectivity does not matter, nor does it cut one off from knowing or seeing the world directly the way it is, or from presenting and arguing for one's convictions. Why? *Because a lack of psychological objectivity does not imply a lack of rational objectivity, and it is the latter that matters most, not the former.*

To understand this, we need to get clear on the notion of rational objectivity. Rational objectivity is the state of having accurate epistemic access to the thing itself. This entails that if one has rational objectivity regarding some topic, then one can discern the difference between genuinely good and bad reasons/evidence for a belief about that topic and one can hold the belief for genuinely good reasons/evidence. The important thing here is that bias does not stand between a knowing subject and an intentional object nor does it eliminate a person's ability to assess the reasons for something. Bias may make it more difficult, but not impossible. If bias made rational objectivity impossible, then no teacher—including the postmodernist herself—could responsibly teach any view the teacher believed on any subject! Nor could the teacher teach opposing viewpoints, because she would be biased against them!

We will return below to the topic of cognitive access to the objects of consciousness, but for now I simply note that Grenz exhibits the twin confusions, so common among postmodernists, of failing to assess properly the nature and value of psychological objectivity, and of failing to distinguish and properly assess the relationship between psychological and rational objectivity.

3. *Confusions between classical foundationalism and foundationalism per se.* Postmodernists reject foundationalism as a theory of epistemic justification. For example, as they assert “the demise of foundationalism,” Stanley Grenz and John Franke observe with irony, “How infirm the foundation.”<sup>5</sup> Rodney Clapp claims that foundationalism has been in “dire straits” for some time, avowing that “few if any careful thinkers actually rely on foundationalist thinking,” even though they cling like addicted smokers to “foundationalist rhetoric.” Says Clapp, evangelicals “should be nonfoundationalists exactly because we are evangelicals.”<sup>6</sup> Nancey Murphy is concerned to justify a “postmodern” theological method in the face of “a general skeptical reaction to the demise of foundationalism in epistemology.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Post-modern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 38. Grenz and Franke use the phrase “the demise of foundationalism” ten times in the first 54 pages (Part I) of the book.

<sup>6</sup> Rodney Clapp, “How Firm a Foundation: Can Evangelicals Be Nonfoundationalists?” in *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000) 19–32.

<sup>7</sup> Nancey Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion and Ethics* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997) 131–32.

A major reason for this rejection is the idea that foundationalism represents a quest for epistemic certainty, and it is this desire to have certainty that provides the intellectual impetus for foundationalism. This so-called Cartesian anxiety is alleged to be the root of foundationalist theories of epistemic justification. But, the argument continues, there is no such certainty, and the quest for it is an impossible one. Further, that quest is misguided, because people do not need certainty to live their lives well. Sometimes Christian postmodernists support this claim by asserting that the quest for certainty is at odds with biblical teaching about faith, the sinfulness of our intellectual and sensory faculties, and the impossibility of grasping an infinite God.

Unfortunately, this depiction of the intellectual motives for foundationalism represents a confusion between foundationalism *per se* and an especially extreme Cartesian form of foundationalism, with the result that versions of modest foundationalism are simply not taken into consideration. To see this, note that “foundationalism” refers to a family of theories about what kinds of grounds constitute justification for belief, all of which hold the following theses:

- (1) A proper noetic structure is *foundational*, composed of properly basic beliefs and non-basic beliefs, where non-basic beliefs are based either directly or indirectly on properly basic beliefs, and properly basic beliefs are non-doxastically grounded, that is, not based entirely on other beliefs;
- (2) The basing relation which confers justification is irreflexive and asymmetrical; and
- (3) A properly basic belief is a belief which meets some Condition C, where the choice of C marks different versions of foundationalism.

Classical foundationalism, of which the Cartesian project is the paradigm example, holds that Condition C is indubitability (or some relevantly similar surrogate): the ground of the belief must guarantee the truth of the belief. It is recognized in nearly all quarters that classical foundationalism is too ambitious. Even granting, as I certainly would, that there are some indubitable beliefs, there simply are not enough of them to ground our entire noetic structure. Further, it clearly seems that certain beliefs which are not indubitable may legitimately be held as properly basic, for example, beliefs grounded in perception, memory, or testimony. What is more, classical foundationalism is motivated largely by the belief that certainty is a necessary condition of knowledge, or that one must know that one knows in order to have knowledge. But these analyses are either too strict or lead to an infinite regress, leading in either case to the skeptic’s lair.

In point of fact, the past three decades have witnessed the development of various versions of foundationalism that avoid the criticisms leveled against the classical version. Among contemporary epistemologists, modest foundationalism of some form is, as one philosopher put it, the “dominant position.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Michael R. DePaul, “Preface,” in *Resurrecting Old-Fashioned Foundationalism* (ed. Michael R. DePaul; Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001) vii.

Thus, it is intellectually irresponsible for Clapp, Murphey, and others to claim that foundationalism is losing favor among philosophers. As far as I can tell, apart from intellectual dishonesty, this false viewpoint can be sustained only by conflating classical foundationalism with foundationalism *per se*, but this is simply mistaken, as the widespread acceptance of modest foundationalism makes clear. Modest foundationalism holds that Condition C is something weaker than indubitability: the ground of the belief must be truth-conducive. Thus at least some properly basic beliefs in a modest foundationalism are defeasible (subject to being shown to be false by subsequent evidence).

4. *Confusions about the identity of the truth bearer.* As we have already seen, the informed correspondence theorist will say that propositions are truth bearers. What is a proposition? Minimally, it is the content of declarative sentences/statements and thoughts/beliefs that is true or false. Beyond that philosophers are in disagreement, but most would agree that a proposition (1) is not located in space or time; (2) is not identical to the linguistic entities that may be used to express it; (3) is not sense perceptible; (4) is such that the same proposition may be in more than one mind at once; (5) need not be grasped by any (at least finite) person to exist and be what it is; (6) may itself be an object of thought when, for example, one is thinking about the content of one's own thought processes; (7) is in no sense a physical entity.

By contrast a sentence is a linguistic type or token consisting in a sense-perceptible string of markings formed according to a culturally arbitrary set of syntactical rules. A statement is a sequence of sounds or body movements employed by a speaker to assert a sentence on a specific occasion. So understood, neither sentences nor statements are good candidates for the basic truth bearer.

It is pretty easy to show that having or using a sentence (or any other piece of language) is neither necessary nor sufficient for thinking or having propositional content. First, it is not necessary. Children think prior to their acquisition of language—how else could they thoughtfully learn language—and, indeed, we all think without language regularly. Moreover, the same propositional content may be expressed by a potentially infinite number of pieces of language and, thus, that content is not identical to any linguistic entity. This alone does not show that language is not necessary for having propositional content. But when one attends to the content that is being held constant as arbitrary linguistic expressions are selected to express it, that content may easily be seen to satisfy the non-linguistic traits of a proposition listed above.

Second, it is not sufficient. If erosion carved an authorless linguistic scribble in a hillside, for example, "I am eroding," then strictly speaking it would have no meaning or content, though it would be empirically equivalent to another token of this type that would express a proposition were it the result of authorial intent.

Postmodernists attack a straw man when they focus on the alleged inadequacies of linguistic objects to do the work required of them in a corre-

spondence theory of truth. Speaking for himself and other postmodernists, Joseph Natoli claims that “[n]o one representation, or narrative, can reliably represent the world because language/pictures/sounds (signifiers) are not permanent labels attached to the things of the world nor do the things of the world dwell inside such signifiers.”<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, even granting the fact that language (and certain sensations) is problematic if taken to represent things in the world (e.g. that the language/world hookup is arbitrary), it follows that human subjects cannot accurately represent the world only if we grant the further erroneous claim that representational entities are limited to language (and certain sensations). But this is precisely what the sophisticated correspondence theorist denies.

Again, Richard Rorty says, “To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is not truth, that sentences are elements of human language, and that human languages are human creations. Truth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. . . . Only descriptions . . . can be true and false.”<sup>10</sup> It should be obvious that Rorty attacks a straw man and that his argument goes through only if we grant that sentences are the fundamental truth bearers.

5. *Confusions about perception and intentionality.* Postmodernists adopt a highly contentious model of perception and intentionality, often without argument, and they seem to enjoin serious consideration of a *prima facie* more plausible model. The result is that postmodernists are far too pessimistic about the prospects of human epistemic success.

Postmodernists adopt a linguistic version of Rene Descartes’s idea theory of perception (and intentionality generally). To understand the idea theory, and the postmodern adaptation of it, a good place to start is with a common sense, critical realist view of perception. According to critical realism, when a subject is looking at a red object such as an apple, the object itself is the direct object of the sensory state. What one sees directly is the apple itself. True, one must have a sensation of red to apprehend the apple, but on the critical realist view, the sensation of red is to be understood as a case of being-appeared-to-redly and analyzed as a *self-presenting property*. What is a self-presenting property? If some property F is a self-presenting one, then it is by means of F that a relevant external object is presented directly to a person, and F presents itself directly to the person as well. Thus, F presents its object mediately though directly, and itself immediately.

This is not as hard to understand as it first may appear. Sensations, such as being-appeared-to-redly, are an important class of self-presenting properties. If Jones is having a sensation of red while looking at an apple, then having the property of being-appeared-to-redly as part of his consciousness modifies his substantial self. When Jones has this sensation, it is a tool that

<sup>9</sup> Natoli, *Primer* 18.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 4–5.

presents the red apple mediately to him, and the sensation also presents itself to Jones. What does it mean to say that the sensation presents the apple to him mediately? Simply this: it is in virtue of or by means of the sensation that Jones directly sees the apple itself.

Moreover, by having the sensation of red, Jones is directly aware both of the apple and his own awareness of the apple. For the critical realist, the sensation of red may, indeed, be a tool or means that Jones uses to become aware of the apple, but he is thereby directly aware of the apple. His awareness of the apple is direct in that nothing stands between Jones and the apple, not even his sensation of the apple. That sensation presents the apple directly, though as a tool Jones must have the sensation as a necessary condition for seeing the apple. On the critical realist view, a knowing subject is not trapped behind or within anything, including a viewpoint, a narrative, an historical-linguistic perspective. To have an entity in the external world as an object of intentionality is to already be “out there”; there is no need to escape anything. One is not trapped behind one’s eyeballs or anything else. It is a basic fallacy of logic to infer that one sees a point-of-viewed-object from the fact that one sees an object from a point of view.

Before leaving the critical realist view, it is important to say that the theory does not limit self-presenting properties to those associated with the five senses and, therefore, does not limit the objects of direct awareness to ordinary sensory objects. The critical realist will say that a knowing subject is capable of direct acquaintance with a host of non-sense-perceptible objects—one’s own ego and its mental states, various abstract objects like the laws of mathematics or logic, and spirit beings, including God.

By contrast, for Descartes’s idea theory, one’s ideas, in this case, sensations, stand between the subject and the object of perception. Jones is directly aware of his own sensation of the apple and indirectly aware of the apple in the sense that it is what causes the sensation to happen. On the idea theory, a perceiving subject is trapped behind his own sensations and cannot get outside them to the external world in order to compare his sensations to their objects to see if those sensations are accurate.

Now, in a certain sense, postmodernists believe that people are trapped behind something in the attempt to get to the external world. However, for them the wall between people and reality is not composed of sensations as it was for Descartes; rather, it is constituted by one’s community and its linguistic categories and practices. One’s language serves as a sort of distorting and, indeed, creative filter. One cannot get outside one’s language to see if one’s talk about the world is the way the world is. Thus, Grenz advocates a new outlook, allegedly representing some sort of consensus in the human sciences, that expresses “a more profound understanding of epistemology. Recent thinking has helped us see that the process of knowing, and to some extent even the process of experiencing the world, can occur only within a conceptual framework, a framework mediated by the social community in which we participate.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Grenz, *Revisioning* 73–74.

It has been noted repeatedly that such assertions are self-refuting. For if we are all trapped behind a framework such that simple, direct seeing is impossible, then no amount of recent thinking can help us see anything; all it could do would be to invite us to see something *as* such and such from within a conceptual framework. Given the self-refuting nature of such claims, and given the fact that we all experience regularly the activity of comparing our conceptions of an entity with the entity itself as a way of adjusting those conceptions, it is hard to see why anyone, especially a Christian, would adopt the postmodern view. In any case, I have seldom seen the realist perspective seriously considered by postmodern thinkers, and until it is, statements like Grenz's will be taken as mere mantras by many of us.

#### V. FINAL REMARKS ABOUT THE IMMORAL NATURE OF POSTMODERNISM

For some time I have been convinced that postmodernism is rooted in pervasive confusions, and I have tried to point out what some of these are. I am also convinced that postmodernism is an irresponsible, cowardly abrogation of the duties that constitute a disciple's calling to be a Christian intellectual and teacher.

In her provocative book entitled *Longing to Know*, Esther Meek asserts that humans as knowers exercise a profound responsibility to submit to the authoritative dictates of reality.<sup>12</sup> Thus, "It is not responsible to deny objective truth and reality in knowing; it is irresponsible. It is not responsible to make the human knower or community of knowers the arbiters of a private truth and reality; it is irresponsible."<sup>13</sup> Again, Meek claims that "[g]ood, responsible knowing brings blessing, shalom; irresponsible knowing brings curse."<sup>14</sup> In another place Meek warns that "the kind of freedom implied by the thought that we humans completely determine our reality leaves us with a gnawing sense of the relative insignificance of our choices. I think it leads not to total responsibility but to careless irresponsibility, both with regard to ourselves and with regard to other humans, not to mention to the world. And, paradoxically, it leads not to a deeper sense of [communal or individual] identity and dignity but to a disheartening lack of it."<sup>15</sup>

We evangelicals need to pay careful attention to Meek's claims. As humans, we live and ought to live our lives not merely by truth but by knowledge of truth. Knowledge of truth gives us confident trust and access to reality. Moreover, as those called to be teachers and scholars for the church and, indeed, for the unbelieving world, we are called not only to impart and defend truth, but to impart and defend knowledge of truth and, even more, to impart and defend knowledge of truth *as* knowledge of truth. This entails that

<sup>12</sup> Esther Lightcap Meek, *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003) 146–47.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 148.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 179.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 182.

we must impart and defend the notion that we do, in fact, have knowledge of important spiritual and ethical truths. Among other things, this gives confidence in truth and knowledge to those we serve. Thus, we are irresponsible not simply if we fail to achieve knowledge of reality; we are doubly irresponsible if we fail to impart to others knowledge *as knowledge*. The corrosive effects of postmodernism eat away at the fulfillment of these duties and responsibilities that constitute our calling from Almighty God.

Meek goes on to point out that the achieving of knowledge and the teaching of it as knowledge “calls for courageous resolve. And this courageous resolve, when proven true, merits the deep admiration of others.”<sup>16</sup> The need for such courage is especially grave today as we labor in an intellectual milieu in which the world views of naturalism and postmodernism both entail that there is no non-empirical knowledge, especially no religious or ethical knowledge.

Faced with such opposition and the pressure it brings, postmodernism is a form of intellectual pacifism that, at the end of the day, recommends backgammon while the barbarians are at the gate. It is the easy, cowardly way out that removes the pressure to engage alternative conceptual schemes, to be different, to risk ridicule, to take a stand outside the gate. But it is precisely as disciples of Christ, even more, as officers in his army, that the pacifist way out is simply not an option. However comforting it may be, postmodernism is the cure that kills the patient, the military strategy that concedes defeat before the first shot is fired, the ideology that undermines its own claims to allegiance. And it is an immoral, coward’s way out that is not worthy of a movement born out of the martyrs’ blood.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 167. For the best, most accessible treatment of postmodernism available, see Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> I wish to thank Garry DeWeese for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.