

HEIDEGGER, GADAMER, AND DERRIDA: THREE FATHERS OF POSTMODERNISM AND THEIR IMPACT ON BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

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Lord willing, I intend to (1) tell a story (a truly postmodern thing to do); (2) formulate briefly the three postmodern approaches to hermeneutics highlighted in the story and contrast them to both our ordinary and biblical expectations for textual interpretation; (3) give contemporary examples of how these postmodern approaches are apparent today; (4) attempt to provide a background for what these postmodern fathers are doing and why they are having an impact on the church today.

I. THE STORY: *Filling a Prescription Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*

A man went to three pharmacists.

The first was Heideggerian. The pharmacist thoughtfully paused as he looked at the prescription and said, "We must understand the good doctor better than he understood himself. What we have here is a closed problematic that must be brought to life by a living question, which is, *What is being?* We must inquire of the matter itself, the primordial question out of which this particular prescription (which is *a being* but not *the being* of beings) was given. We must wrest the ontological unsaid from the ontical said so as to uncover what the doctor really meant to say. We can only and properly understand this prescription not by attempting to understand what it means in its actuality (which is impossible anyway) but by seizing upon and transforming it as a possibility — *i.e.*, a possibility for existence itself, for what it means to be true to ourselves as Dasein, true to what is our own necessity as an authentic people, and true to what it means, in that sense, *to be*. When we take any text and transform it in such an original way that we exert our power *to be* over that text, then — and only then — do we have understanding."

As the pharmacist cupped his chin in his hand and deliberated over the prescription, the customer was feeling a little less than confident about this transaction. He had never known a pharmacist to speak this way. He even wondered for a moment if he might be in an episode of the Twilight Zone. So just as the pharmacist was finishing his little discourse, the customer gently retrieved the prescription from the pharmacist and said, "I'm so sorry. It just hit me that I'm supposed to pick up my daughter from her piano lesson. But thank you ever so much for the insights on my prescription!" Then he went promptly to another drugstore.

The second pharmacist was Gadamerian. He looked at the prescription and said, "Now if we understand the good doctor at all, we only understand him *differently*. This is a prescription that comes to us from the past, from a different

horizon or perspective from our own, and so we must meet him halfway in a *fusion of horizons*. We must see that the past as tradition or prejudice is something that has happened to us. It makes us what we are. We are its effect, not merely its detached and neutral cause or arbitrator. This means that *truth is our history or what happens to us in time*—including our prejudices—*beyond our rational choices*. We cannot be objective about it as to what we should accept or reject from it in a completely self-critical manner, because it gives us the very eyes through which we see. Time moves on and always differentiates us from the past, as Hegel makes clear. Hence, we can only compromise or negotiate with the past from our own present time with an awareness that the present creates a blindside toward the past, while also providing new eyes with which to see ourselves and our past. It's a dialogue with the past, you see, in which we never can "get" its actual meaning situated as it is in a different time or situation, but we can nevertheless recognize its influence and let that influence be a catalyst to effect a new, hybrid meaning for our present time."

By now our customer, who was not feeling too well at all in the first place, was beginning to experience a greater sense of unwellness along with a certain profound level of frustration and disbelief. In fact, he couldn't say anything, no matter how hard he tried. He just shook his head as his way of taking his leave, turned around, and went elsewhere.

The third pharmacist was Derridean. He looked at the prescription and curtly stated, "I'm afraid we can only *misunderstand* the good doctor and that's the best we can do even after we have deconstructed 'good' and 'doctor'. Your doctor did not mean to say anything by writing this prescription, nor could he, even if he had tried. This means that *there is nothing outside this little text*. Nothing to assure, found, or center its meaning—just the ubiquity of interpretation. As Nietzsche says, "There are no facts, only interpretations."

At this point the Derridean pharmacist leaned toward his wary customer and in a chastising gesture began poking him on the chest as he continued to speak: "All the problems of this world (particularly, the fear of or hatred toward those who are different from us) derive from just this sort of logocentric thinking, this assumption of a *metaphysics of presence*, evident in this [pointing at the prescription] pretentious and suspicious little piece of paper with writing on it! Don't you see that if we could just learn to accept the play of difference in our inevitable misunderstandings, in all the instability of language, we would all get along much better. After all, life is not so much about understanding some final truth or story of stories—which doesn't exist anyway, since "all our truths are fictions"—as it is getting along with one another, as we tell our various stories. As Nietzsche says, "Truth is merely a mobile army of metaphors." Metaphors are good for the imagination and sustaining "the unbearable lightness of being" but not for drawing lines in the sand and separating people from one another.

By now our customer had had enough. Without waiting for any further philosophico-medical advice from the Derridean pharmacist, our customer abruptly turned on his heels to leave the store. But as he walked away, the

pharmacist had his parting shot, which he yelled across the store: "Oh, and by the way, did you know that *pharmakon*, the Greek word for medicine, also means 'poison'?" The customer lightly bounced the palm of his hand against his forehead and in an upward motion, as he continued to walk briskly out of the store.

Our beleaguered customer was about to give up and just live with his illness. But he decided to try one more drugstore. This time, though, he promptly found the pharmacist, and before he handed him his prescription, he grabbed him by his lapels and shouted, "Do you know anything about Continental Philosophy?" With considerable dismay and confusion, the pharmacist said simply, "Uh...no... or... at least...very little. Why?" "Good!," the customer replied, "Here's my prescription."

II. BRIEF FORMULATION: *The Three Postmodern Approaches to Hermeneutics & How They Contrast with Ordinary & Biblical Expectations for Hermeneutics*

Whether filling prescriptions, responding appropriately to a supervisor's memo, honoring a contract, grading a student's exam or term paper, observing treaties between nations, upholding the laws of the land, retrieving and preserving meaning from valued texts of any kind (whether Shakespeare or the morning newspaper), following directions (e.g., for getting some place in a car or putting a bookcase together), or reading an email from a friend or loved one, most of us are not interested in relating to texts the way our three pharmacists are doing in this story. Nor would we accept the view that these hermeneutical approaches are the only possibility for interpreting such texts. Moreover, as Christians we may well find these perspectives unacceptable due to fundamental assumptions integral to an appropriate understanding of God's self-disclosure in and through the biblical text. Or, to make a spiritual application of the above story, as Christians we see ourselves as having received a prescription (i.e., textual communication) from the Great Physician of our souls to both diagnose and treat the sickness of sin in our lives. A shared cognitive and meaningful content between God and us and achieved through words (or a text) is absolutely integral to the success of this communication and the healing that comes by it. There are prescriptions, then, both for the body and the soul whose efficacy depends precisely on doing what our postmodern philosophers say cannot be done: *understanding the actual meaning of the text*.

One might even say that the Bible comes to us (both explicitly and implicitly) with a prefatory and divine command: *Read the text!* Whether one considers the frequent exhortation of the prophets to "Hear the Word of the Lord" or its variation as used by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, "Let him who has ears to hear, let him hear" or the simple exhortation of Matthew 24:15, "let the reader understand," there is an important assumption behind this call:

God is speaking to us through a text — both spoken and written. There is a knowable meaning in it. We *can* and *must* understand this text. We are

commanded to do so. We will, in fact, be held eternally accountable for what God is saying to us in his text.

Hence, contrary to these philosophico-hermeneutical approaches which uniformly and essentially deny that there is a decipherable meaning in the text (what Continental philosophers call a *metaphysics of presence*), a meaning that can be understood on its own terms, we believe as Christians that there is meaning in the biblical text, and that especially when it comes to matters of salvation, that meaning is *simple* (not complex), *clear* (not obscure), *stable* (not unstable), *accessible* to the understanding (not inaccessible) — in short: *knowable* (not unknowable).

As Christians, we believe that when Moses says that the Word of God is not "far off" (reflecting a *metaphysics of absence*) — not "in heaven" or "beyond the sea" — but "very near you," he is telling the people of Israel that the transcendent Word of God as text has a *metaphysics of presence* or immanence such that it *can* be known, believed, and obeyed (Deuteronomy 30:11-14; see also Romans 10:5-9). Therefore, there can be *no excuses* (not even postmodern ones); such as ignorance, indecidability, uncertainty, the instability or ambiguity of language, the radical and relativizing differentiation created by history or culture, or the lack of a Logos which centers and sustains an ordered and systematic meaning which applies to all of existence.

Consequently, whereas our above mentioned pharmacists under the influence of continental philosophers are characterizing a reader's epistemic relationship to an author as, in every case, a necessary "disconnect" of some sort, God is through Scripture speaking to us of a necessary "connect" — *i.e.*, a connection where there is a shared understanding between his mind and that of those who hear his Word. If we were to put this in a hermeneutical proposition, it would read something like this: "*We must understand the author as he has made himself understood.*" On the other hand, the distinctive "disconnect" between the author and reader, which reflects each of the philosophers under review here, represents what may be summarily worded in the following ways:

Heidegger: *We must understand the author better than he understood himself.*

Gadamer: *If we understand the author at all, we understand differently.*

Derrida: *All our understandings (of the author) are misunderstandings.*

III. CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES: *How These Postmodern Approaches to Hermeneutics Are Apparent among Christian Scholars and Church Leaders Today*

If one observes carefully the postmodern hermeneutical approaches highlighted here, one could argue that they mostly agree on the following points: (1) there is no epistemically extant or accessible meaning present in the text itself that the reader(s) can know objectively and verifiably; (2) how the text is interpreted or appropriated will differ from what the text actually means or says on its own terms; (3) interpretation must be intersubjective or communal (the postmodern shift), not individualistic (the modern approach); (4) and the intersubjective or communal interpretation will rightly or inevitably dominate the text.

Now let us consider how the above listed points are apparent in the published writings of certain Christian scholars today.

Case #1: Stanley Hauerwas (from *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America*).

"Yet we must acknowledge that the text has no 'real' meaning, and no real, abstract 'human understanding' exists to constitute such meaning" (p. 20). [point 1]

"...strategies of interpretation are not those of an independent agent facing an independent autonomous text, but those of an interpretative community of which the reader is but a member" (p. 21). [point 3]

"There simply is no 'real meaning' of Paul's letters to the Corinthians once we understand that they are no longer Paul's letters but rather the Church's Scripture. Such examples remind us...that texts only exist in a continuing web of interpretive practices" (p. 20). [points 1 and 3]

"You do not have or need 'a meaning' of the text when you understand that Church is more determinative than text" (p. 23). [points 1, 3, and 4]

"When *sola scriptura* is used to underwrite the distinction between text and interpretation, then it seems clear to me that *sola scriptura* is a heresy rather than a help in the Church....It assumes that the text of Scripture makes sense separate from a Church that gives it sense" (p. 27). [points 1, 3, and 4]

Case #2: James K.A. Smith (from *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* [WAP] and *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* [FI])

"...the context for understanding a text...is established by a community of interpreters who come to an agreement about what constitutes the true interpretation of a text..." (WAP, p. 53). [points 1, 3, and 4]

"This modern isolationist understanding of the human self has often crept into the church, which has too often valorized a notion of private interpretation (by wrongly appealing to the Reformation principle of the perspicuity of Scripture), suggesting that the meaning of the Scriptures is simply and objectively there—available for the taking" (WAP, p. 56). [point 1 and implying points 3 and 4]

"While the church is governed by the Scriptures, the Scriptures are only properly opened and active within the believing community. To say that there is nothing outside the Text also entails that there is no proper understanding of the Text—and hence the world—apart from the Spirit-governed community of the church. The same Spirit is both author of the text and illuminator of the reading community" (WAP, pp. 56-57). [points 1, 3, and 4]

"We recite the ecumenical and historic creeds because these are the witness of our community past—the way for us to hear the interpretations of the ancient community, which was indwelt by the same Spirit that indwells us and grants illumination today" (WAP, p. 57). [points 3 and 4]

"...we never have simply 'the Scriptures' pure, [unadorned], and uninterpreted; every appeal to 'what the Bible says' is an appeal to an *interpretation* of the Bible. Whenever someone promises to deliver 'the Scriptures alone,' he or she has always already delivered an interpretation that is carried out within an interpretive tradition" (FI, p. 53). [points 1, 3, and 4]

"Further, to privilege the interpretive matrix of the Scriptures and apostles is simply to posit one interpretation over against another, one culture over another... [an] appeal to Scripture as the final interpretive lens fails to recognize this double effect of the ubiquity of interpretation: that we only 'have' Scripture as interpreted and that, further, the Scriptures themselves are interpretations. Theology, then, is the translation of a translation—the Scriptures are themselves translations" (FI, p. 56). [points 1, 3, and 4]

"...Christianity and Buddhism have very different interpretations about the nature of reality. However, we need to consider these as deep differences in interpretation rather than glibly supposing that the Christian account is objectively true and then castigating the Buddhist account for being merely an interpretation. In fact, both are interpretations; neither is objectively true. And so, to a certain extent, we must also embrace this postlapsarian or directional pluralism as the given situation in which we find ourselves" (WAP, pp. 50-51). [points 1 and 4]

Case #3: Roger Ebertz (from "Beyond Worldview Analysis: Insights from Hans-Georg Gadamer on Christian Scholarship," *Christian Scholar's Review*)

"I have become convinced that...articulating *the* [emphasis mine - jp] Christian worldview is impossible....It is always our perspective on the biblical worldview that we arrive at, not the biblical worldview itself....As Christians, our worldviews are shaped in part by our biblical faith. But they are shaped also by the cultures, historical traditions, and language communities into which we are born, including the scientific understandings of our age" (pp. 15-17). [points 1-4]

"Biblical interpretation is never an individualistic matter; we all interpret the Scriptures through thick lenses we have learned from our faith communities, either as we have grown up or as we have matured in our faith as adults" (p. 25) [points 1, 3, and 4]

"Our own understandings can never capture the Bible's meaning, but must always be tested and put into play against it [though it is ultimately not knowable - jp]" (p. 28). [points 2-4]

"...we should be careful not to identify our finite understanding [of Scripture] with the Truth that surpasses understanding" (p. 28). [points 2-4]

IV. BIG PICTURE: *What These Postmodern Philosophers Are Doing and Why They Are Having an Impact on the Church Today*

A. The Death of God

So what are these philosophers doing? Among Continental philosophers today — "understanding" itself has become a significant philosophical problem. What it means to understand someone or something, what the limits and possibilities of understanding are, and what understanding entails in metaphysical terms (its ultimate essence or nature) has come under a radical level of questioning. Without exception, the philosophers under review in this paper are working from presuppositions which alter or challenge what we commonly understand as "understanding" precisely because *they are consciously and deliberately working out the implications of a philosophical rejection of either the existence of God and/or any normative, supernatural communication from God (such as a sacred text that can be understood on its own terms)*. The "death of God" (or absence of God) announced in various ways by post-Kant philosophers like Hegel, Schopenhauer, Feuerbach, and Nietzsche is seen in its postmodern form as requiring certain consequences for language, meaning, and communication itself. As Nietzsche says, "I am afraid we are not rid of God, because we still believe in grammar."¹ On Continental Philosophy's account: wherever there are rules, strategies, or standards for communication, wherever there is a word supposedly and successfully shared between

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 483.

communicating beings (speaker/listener, author/reader, etc.), there is a suspicious and questionable enactment on a smaller scale of what must be rejected on a grander, metaphysical scale: *a God who exists, speaks, and can be successfully understood*. To accomplish a breakdown of the author/reader communication in this sense, then, is a sort of philosophical sign or protest, a "burning in effigy" of any idea or presupposition that God exists and has (or can have) a relationship with people based on a shared understanding achieved through spoken or written words. This "burning" occurs every time the primacy of authorial intention in hermeneutics is supplanted by the intention of the reader.

Now I do not say all this, particularly in this context, as some sort of *ad hominem* attempt to dismiss these philosophers out of hand, nor to scare us away from any insights that they might offer us by God's common grace. I say this to underscore how radically and thoughtfully their proposals are grounded on metaphysical concerns and assumptions — *i.e.*, if we are Christian theists and are attracted (for whatever reason) to their conclusions for hermeneutics, their philosophy itself will rightly demand of us an answer as to how or why we would claim to believe in Jesus Christ (the Logos of God) who upholds or centers the universe (physically and semantically) —or the Author of Life and God of the Bible (in whom we live and move and have *our knowing* as well as our being)—and yet still want to play with the big boys and girls in academia who are having all the fun deconstructing texts and reality claims, relativizing and denying a knowable truth (with a capital "T"), and, in general, revelling in uncertainty. If we join them, to whatever extent, in such exercises, we owe them at least enough philosophical integrity to provide a credible metaphysical explanation for it. For my own part, I have never seen such an explanation given, apart from excessive inferential mileage obtained from human finitude and the noetic effects of the Fall.

B. Immanuel Kant and Textual Meaning as the Unknowable Noumenal

What predates the "death of God" movement and in an important sense accounts for it is the transcendental idealism of Kant. It was not just that Kant produced plausible challenges to the classical arguments (of Aquinas and others) for the existence of God but that Kant reinterpreted knowing itself such that God was shut out by what was requisite for intelligible experience—*viz.*, *direct sensory perception*. When Kant responds to Hume's denial of a rational world (specifically, the law of cause and effect²) by limiting rationality to the mind itself, Kant makes a distinction between phenomenal (the way things appear to us) and noumenal knowledge (the way things actually are in

² Hume argues that there is no rational necessity in the world itself which guarantees that observed effects must always follow their corresponding causes. If striking billiard ball A with a cue stick results in ball A's hitting ball B and causing B to move, we can only say that this sequence of events (or association of ideas as Hume's material idealism has it) is what we have experienced in the past and not what we rationally must experience in the future. It is entirely possible, Hume says, that at some future time ball B may be struck by A and not move. The implication of Hume's argument, then, is that the world in itself is not rational (or rationally ordered) and to believe that it is, arises merely from habit or custom which are irrational sources or influences.

themselves). According to Kant, we can know the former but not the latter. In concession to Hume, Kant gave up a knowable real world, in order to rescue rationality from skepticism. His version of idealism did not deny that matter or reality actually exists (as Berkeley's immaterial idealism did); it only denied that we could know such as it actually is. A careful student of Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, writes that Kant construed human or phenomenal knowledge as the "veil of Maya" or illusion; Schopenhauer rightly understood that knowledge which cannot be verifiably checked against a knowable reality is *illusory* in nature.

One word more about Kant's "transcendental idealism": Idealism is the view that reality is primarily mental or mind-dependent and, in its materialist version, epistemically problematic.³ It is usually contrasted with realism which holds that reality is extramental or mind-independent and not necessarily epistemically problematic. (This is how I use these terms, though there is disagreement in philosophy as to who qualifies as an idealist or a realist.) Kant carefully thought through the distinction between realism and idealism and explained his own transcendental idealism in the following manner: he said, in effect, that he believed in the existence of empirical reality (there is a real world and our experience of it is real) but that nonetheless the mind is such that this reality gets processed or conditioned (the mind's "transcendental" or active role in knowledge-formation) through a kind of grid or cookie cutter, if you will—and therefore, reality is in some sense altered, distorted, or *interpreted* in its phenomenal version. Our problem is, Kant would say, that we cannot get outside our minds to check the real world against the way it is being interpretively "performed" or "presented" by the mind. That is, we have no way of knowing if our way of *knowing* or *interpreting* the world actually matches the way the world is. (This is what is called the "categorio-centric" or "ego-centric predicament.") Whereas Plato's problem for epistemology involves the portrayal of the body and physicality in general as the prison of the mind (setting the limits to knowing), Kant does the same thing but with a different set of problems unique to what happens when the mind is its own prison.

What does this have to do with our three postmodern fathers? When Kant set up the phenomenal-noumenal distinction, he included in the *unknowable* noumenal: God, the soul/self, the thing-in-itself (facts, objects, actual history, etc.)— in short, what is actually and substantially there in terms of reality (Francis Schaeffer's "true truth") but not mind-conditioned for its epistemological status, nor mind-dependent for its ontological status. After Kant, philosophers like Hegel and our three postmodern fathers will all grapple with the conditioning aspect of the mind (in that sense, they all agree with Kant and are all, to that extent and in their own way, carrying on the idealist tradition). Their question will be: What conditions or determines the mind which in turn conditions/imprisons/delimits all knowing? After Hegel (and with our three postmodern fathers), there will be an increasing emphasis upon history, culture, and language as what determines the mind in its knowing. There will also be a more intersubjective and communal emphasis for

³ A material idealist believes that matter is real; an immaterial idealist (like Berkeley), that matter is not real.

knowing rather than that the individualistic emphasis of other modern philosophers such as Descartes. This was already present in Kant's epistemology; his rationalistic concern for universality (or universal nature) made him always conscious of a critical role for the communal aspect of knowing.

In time (and with both German and French continental philosophers hot on the trail) the focus will shift to texts: meaning in a text as Kant's noumenal—the unknowable thing-in-itself. The disconnect between phenomenal and noumenal knowing will translate into the disconnect between the reader's interpretation and the text's actual meaning. When Kant's transcendental idealism is applied to hermeneutics, then, it supports all four of the points highlighted above: (1) no knowable, extant meaning in the text; (2) interpretation as differentiated from the actual meaning of the text (no verification possible); (3) interpretation as intersubjective or communal by nature; (4) intersubjective or communal interpretation as dominant over the text.

Concluding Remarks

1. Hume's denial of rationality in the world itself, as evident in his rejection of any necessary connection between an effect and its cause, only works under a more vulnerable, deistic worldview. If one sees the world as made and governed by a Creator who is rational but also personal, sovereign, and free in relation to his creation which manifests his rationality—i.e., a God who is "over all, through all, and in all"—then there is a basis for the claim that there is rationality in the universe itself, but it does not operate as a closed and impersonal system (as deism claims). Hume is right in claiming that there is no rational necessity that an effect must always follow a cause as it normally does in our experience. But, he is wrong in thinking that therefore there is no such rationality or regularity in the universe itself. A sovereign Creator who establishes regularities in creation ("laws of nature") by virtue of his covenant faithfulness toward that creation is not by that fact bound by such regularities. Hence, when the Creator came to earth in the form of a man (Jesus Christ), he varied or suspended the law of gravity and walked on water, as a sign of his deity. The possibility of irregularity which Hume said could not be ruled out is very real, but it depends on the will of a personal and rational Creator; it does not reduce the perception of a rational regularity in the world to skepticism or to a groundless, habitual way of looking at things. If Kant had believed in the faithful covenant-keeping Creator of the Bible, he would not have taken the desperate course of saving rationality by removing it from the world itself and confining it to the human mind.

2. This leads me to my last point: Neither material nor immaterial idealism squares with the kind of knowing we are blessed with as creatures made in the image of God. Nor do they square with the prerequisites for the self-disclosure of God we read about in Scripture. If we change those prerequisites, we will find ourselves going in directions which are contrary to Scripture and which will change what it means to know God. Bishop Berkeley saw rightly that the material idealism of Descartes and Locke arguably

shuts God out and leads to atheism. What he did not see is that his immaterial idealism (the denial of the reality of matter) is not the answer; it is not enough to simply say that all knowing is mental, that *to be is to be perceived*, and then declare God as the ultimate mind and perceiver who assures human knowing. The material world is an important component for knowing and for reality—even for knowing the God who sustains our being and knowing.

3. Finally, idealism (whether Platonic or any of its modern and postmodern variety) always involves a belief that the mind is in a state of imprisonment or captivity. It means that we are shut up within our own heads and shut out from what is external to them. The only reality we can know is a human reality divorced from the reality of our world and our God.

There are two Scriptures that come to mind here: (1) the passage where Paul speaks of "destroying arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God" and of taking "every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5) and (2) the passage where Paul warns us to see to it that no one takes us "captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8). Putting these together, as Christians we are to be on the offense for destroying arguments that are opposed to what it means to know God as detailed in Scripture and employing what we know of God in Christ in that manner for "destroying arguments" and taking "every thought captive to obey Christ." We are also not to be taken captive by philosophy.

Hence, the charge we have received as Christians means that we will either *be taking captive* (making gains against God-denying ideas in the world) or *be taken captive* (sustaining losses from God-denying ideas in the world). I cannot imagine a more obvious strategy of the Enemy to achieve this captivity than to first convince us that we are in fact captives to our own minds, shut up within a purely human and subjective reality and shut out from a knowable God, truth, or reality outside our minds. In any controlling or enslaving relationship, the first move is to tell the subjugated one what they cannot do in order to facilitate dependence on the oppressor. For example, an abusive husband will tell his wife that she cannot take care of herself or make her own way in the world, that she is entirely dependent upon him. This is what our Enemy attempts to do with us through the various modern and postmodern versions of idealism: he tries to convince us that we cannot know anything but what our minds create or constitute as reality or truth. He tries to convince us that we are so determined or conditioned by our history, culture, language, or sociological status that we cannot see outside of it — that we are captives existing behind the bars of our own mental constructs for processing reality. If we accept this, it basically means that we are genetically "of the world"— "in" it and "of" it by virtue of our humanity itself—and cannot be otherwise. Rather than being creatures of God made in his image, we become under such a philosophy creatures of the world, necessarily and essentially made in its image. How nice for the one who is the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4)!

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