

Everyone is Some Sort of Foundationalist (Franke vs. Moreland)

[The Return of the Solas? Exegesis & Reviews for the Diaspora](#)

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Wednesday, 14 February 2007

Actually, could we say that in the portion of the world that has heard the words of Christ, there are just two kinds of foundationalists, based on the two foundations of Matt 7:24-27? There are rock foundationalists (wise men who hear the words of Jesus and act on them) and sand foundationalists (fools who hear the words of Christ but do not act on them). Wise foundationalists and foolish foundationalists, just like the two seeds of Genesis 3:15, the two ways of Psalm 1, etc., etc.

As an aside, let us not be misled into confining "the words of Jesus" to the immediate context (the sermon on the Mount) or even the words in red of our red letter Bibles. Since Jesus is the eternal Son, the Bible as a whole, "the word of God," should be considered the word of Christ. Those who are wise, then, build upon the foundation of the Bible, which is sufficient so that the man of God will be equipped for every good work. Those who are fools have other foundations. Even people who say there are no secure foundations must have some foundation for making such a claim, right?

Along the same lines, two papers are shown below, both read at the annual ETS convention, 2005. It looks to me like John Franke quotes from Karl Barth in a foundational manner, as if to explain Barth is to show something to be true. I've referred to this talk elsewhere on this site; now see for yourself as you read the paper below, and then contrast it with J.P. Moreland's response. A good example of sand and rock, folly and wisdom?

In John Franke's paper he mentions J.P. Moreland's plenary address at ETS the previous year ("Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn," delivered November 18, 2004). To supply some context I quote from the [conclusion of that paper](#):

...postmodernism is an immoral and cowardly viewpoint such that persons who love truth and knowledge, especially disciples of the Lord Jesus, should do everything they can to heal the plague that postmodernism has and inevitably does leave...

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...

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.

The full paper is posted at [Stand to Reason](#).

Nonfoundationalism, Truth, and the Knowledge of God

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In recent conversations among evangelicals concerning theological method and philosophy, much debate has

been generated over the appropriateness of a nonfoundational approach to theology. Critics of this approach sometimes assert that it essentially undermines the Christian faith. What I want to do in this brief address is to briefly testify to my reasons for the adoption of a nonfoundational approach to theology. I do this as a means of providing a response, in accordance with my assigned task in this session, to some of the concerns raised by J. P. Moreland in his plenary address at last year's annual meeting. The thrust of that address, as I have read it, is that in their attempts to engage and appropriate aspects of postmodern thought, some evangelicals have actually capitulated to the "spirit of the age" with negative consequences for Christian faith. I will not attempt to answer each of his concerns in detail, but rather try to give a positive account of nonfoundationalism and the knowledge of God. I hope that this procedure will serve to address, at least indirectly, many of the issues raised by J. P. and provide a context for the discussion to follow.

Karl Barth stated, "As [theologians] we ought to speak of God. We are human, however, and so cannot speak of God. We ought therefore to recognize both our obligation and our inability and by that very recognition give God the glory."^[1] These three assertions provide a concise summary of the situation faced by theology that would seek to bear faithful witness to the living God. In response to this situation, Barth commends a dialectical approach to theology which acknowledges aspects of the truth found in other methods, but with an awareness of their fragmentary and relative nature. "This way from the outset undertakes seriously and positively to develop the idea of God on the one hand and the criticism of humanity and all things human on the other; but they are not now considered independently but are both referred constantly to their common presupposition, to the living truth which, to be sure, may not be named, but which lies between them and gives to both their meaning and interpretation."^[2] However, even in the dialectical approach, it is still the case that human beings are not able to speak of God since they are incapable of relating the affirmations of the dogmatic approach or the negations of the self-critical approach to the reality of the living God at the center of theology since God never enters into the control of human beings. Therefore the only thing that can be properly done is to bear witness to the realities of this situation and to take care to continually relate human affirmations and human negations to each other.

The dialectical theologian knows that this living center cannot be apprehended or beheld and will therefore give direct information and communication about it as seldom as possible in the knowledge "that all such information, whether it be positive or negative, is not really information, but always either dogma or self-criticism. On this narrow ridge of rock one can only walk." If we attempt to stand still we will fall to either the right or the left, hence the only choice is to keep moving forward constantly looking from one side to the other, from positive to negative and from negative to positive.^[3] However, while a dialectical method is preferable, this is not because it is more successful than other ways at speaking of God. The fundamental assertion remains, we cannot speak of God. From the standpoint of human beings, theology is an impossibility. Theology becomes possible only where God speaks when God is spoken of. Since human beings have no control over this self-revelatory speech, they are always dependent on God in the task of theology. Given the reality of this state of affairs, what humans are able to do is bear witness to their creaturely inadequacy by the continual negation of theological assertions by the affirmation of alternative and opposing assertions. This ongoing practice of setting statement against statement constitutes the shape of Barth's dialectical theological method. But this dialectical method is not the means by which humans are able to speak of God. It is rather an emergency measure adopted as the only possible way to bear witness to the impossibility of human speech about God in light of their obligation to bear witness. The dialectical method serves as the means of bearing formal witness to the inadequacy of human beings for the task of theology and their dependence on God.

This does not mean that theology is utterly impossible, it simply means that where it is possible, it is only so as a divine possibility. Only by the grace of God in which God takes up human words and uses them for the purposes of self-revelation, in spite of their inherent inadequacy for the task of genuine self-revelation, does theology become possible. Hence, theology is an impossible possibility that is made possible only by the will of God. Even revelation does not provide human beings with a knowledge that exactly corresponds to that of God. The infinite qualitative distinction between God and human beings suggests the accommodated character of all human knowledge of God. For John Calvin, this means that in the process of revelation God "adjusts" and "descends" to the capacities of human beings in order to reveal the infinite mysteries of divine reality, which by their very nature are beyond the capabilities of human creatures to grasp due to the limitations that arise from their finite character.^[4] These observations give rise to the theological adage,

finitum non capax infiniti, the finite cannot comprehend the infinite. The natural limitations of human beings with respect to the knowledge of God made known in the process of revelation extend not only to the cognitive and imaginative faculties but also to the creaturely mediums by which revelation is communicated. In other words, the very means used by God in revelation, the mediums of human nature, language and speech, bear the inherent limitations of their creaturely character in spite of the use God makes of them as the bearers of revelation. In Chalcedonian Christology, the divine and human natures of Christ remain distinct and unimpaired even after their union in Jesus of Nazareth. Reformed theological formulations of Christology consistently maintained that one of the implications of the Chalcedonian definition was the denial of the “divinization” of the human nature of Christ in spite of its relationship to the divine nature. With respect to the revelation of God in Christ, this means that the creaturely medium of revelation, in this case the human nature of Christ, is not divinized through union with the divine nature but remains subject to the limitations and contingencies of its creaturely character. Yet in spite of these limitations, God is truly revealed through the appointed creaturely medium.

This dynamic is captured in the dialectic of veiling and unveiling and the notion of indirect identity. This means that in his self-revelation God makes himself to be indirectly identical with the creaturely medium of that revelation. Such revelation is indirect because God’s use of the creaturely medium entails no “divinization” of the medium; and yet at the same time God is indirectly identical with the creaturely medium in that God chooses to truly reveal himself through such mediums. This is the dialectic of “veiling and unveiling” which maintains that God unveils (reveals) himself in and through creaturely veils, and that these veils, although they be used of God for the purposes of unveiling himself, remain veils. Further, the self-revelation of God means that the whole of God, complete and entire, and not simply a part, is made known in revelation, but nevertheless remains hidden within the veil of the creaturely medium through which he chooses to unveil himself. Hence, nothing of God is known directly by natural human perception.

In Christological terms, as Bruce McCormack observes, this means that the process by which God takes on human nature and becomes the subject of a human life in human history entails no impartation or communication of divine attributes and perfections to that human nature. This in turn means that “revelation is not made a predicate of the human nature of Jesus; revelation may not be read directly ‘off the face of Jesus’. And yet, it remains true that God (complete, whole, and entire) is the Subject of this human life. God, without ceasing to be God, becomes human and lives a human life, suffers and dies.”^[5] The consequence of this notion of indirect revelation is that it remains hidden to outward, normal, or “natural” human perception and requires that human beings be given “the eyes and ears of faith” in order to perceive the unveiling of God that remains hidden in the creaturely veil. In this conception revelation has both an objective moment, when God reveals himself through the veil of a creaturely medium, and a subjective moment, when God gives human beings the faith to understand what is hidden in the veil. In this instance, the objective moment is Christological while the subjective moment is pneumatological.

In the framework of indirect identity, we are able to affirm God’s use of language in the act of revelation without denying our theological and existential awareness of its inherent limitations and contingencies as a contextually situated creaturely medium. It should be added that Barth secures the divine primacy in God’s epistemic relations with human beings by maintaining the “actualistic” character of revelation. In other words, revelation in this conception is not simply a past event that requires nothing further from God. This would imply that God had ceased to act and become directly identical with the medium of revelation. If this were the case, the epistemic relationship between God and human beings would be static rather than dynamic with the result that human beings would be able to move from a position of epistemic dependency to one of epistemic mastery. Instead, God always remains indirectly identical with the creaturely mediums of revelation, thus requiring continual divine action in the knowing process and securing the ongoing epistemic dependency of human beings with respect to the knowledge of God.^[6]

This epistemic dependency that is the natural outworking of indirect revelation points to the nonfoundational character of theological epistemology. As mentioned previously, where theology becomes possible in spite of its impossibility from the human side, it does so only as a divine possibility. An approach to theology that takes these insights on board will be one that finds its ongoing basis in the dialectic of the divine veiling and unveiling in revelation. This construal of revelation demands a theology that takes seriously the ongoing reality of divine action not only on the level of the theological epistemology it presupposes but also on the level of

the theological method it employs. Apart from this, theology is reduced to something that is humanly achievable and subject to human manipulation and control in which it becomes “a regular, bourgeois science alongside all the other sciences.”^[7]

A nonfoundationalist approach to theology seeks to respond positively and appropriately to the situatedness of all human thought and therefore to embrace a principled theological pluralism as an appropriate part of a dialectical theology. It also attempts to affirm that the ultimate authority in the church is not a particular source, be it Scripture, tradition, reason, or experience but only the living God. Therefore, if we must speak of “foundations” for the Christian faith and its theological enterprise, then we must speak only of the triune God who is disclosed in polyphonic fashion through Scripture, the church, and the world, albeit always in accordance with the normative witness to divine self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. It promotes a theology with an inherent commitment to a principle of continual reformation and maintains without reservation that no single human perspective, be it that of an individual or a particular community or theological tradition, is adequate to do full justice to the truth of God’s revelation in Christ.

Some fear that a nonfoundationalist approach to theology presupposes a denial of Truth. Now it is certainly correct that some nonfoundationalists move in this direction and express their commitment to the finitude of human knowledge in a statement such as: the truth is that Truth does not exist. Thus, the assertion is made that nonfoundationalism denies the reality of Truth per se. However, Merold Westphal maintains that such a claim “stems not from analyzing the interpretive character of human thought but from placing that analysis in an atheistic context. If our thinking never merits the triumphalist title of Truth and there is no other knower whose knowledge is the Truth, then the truth is that there is no Truth. But if the first premise is combined with a theistic premise, the result will be: The truth is that there is Truth, but not for us, only for God.”^[8] Here, employing the metaphorical language of foundations, an important distinction is made between epistemological and ontological foundations. While nonfoundationalist theology means the end of foundationalism it does not signal the denial of “foundations” or Truth.

However, these “foundations” are not “given” to human beings. As Bruce McCormack notes, they “always elude the grasp of the human attempt to know and to establish them from the human side” and they cannot be demonstrated or secured “philosophically or in any other way.”^[9] Hence, human beings are always in a position of dependence and in need of grace with respect to epistemic relations with God. Attempts on the part of humans to seize control of these relations are all too common throughout the history of the church and, no matter how well intentioned, inevitably lead to forms of oppression and conceptual idolatry. Nonfoundationalist theology seeks to oppose such seizure through the promotion of a form of theology and a theological ethos that humbly acknowledges and bears witness to the human condition of finitude and fallenness and that, by grace if at all, does not belie the subject of theology to which it seeks to bear faithful witness. On this basis Karl Barth concludes that the focal point and “foundation” of Christian faith, the God revealed in Jesus Christ, determines that in the work and practice of theology “there are no comprehensive views, no final conclusions and results. There is only the investigation and teaching which take place in the act of dogmatic work and which, strictly speaking, must continually begin again at the beginning in every point. The best and most significant thing that is done in this matter is that again and again we are directed to look back to the center and foundation of it all.”^[10]

^[1] Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, Translated by Douglas Horton (New York: Harper, 1957), 186.

^[2] Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 206.

^[3] Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 207.

^[4] On Calvin’s understanding of the accommodated character of all human knowledge of God, see Edward A. Dowey, Jr. *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 3-24.

^[5] Bruce L. McCormack, “Beyond Nonfoundational and Postmodern Readings of Barth: Critically Realistic

Dialectical Theology,” *Zeitschrift für dialektische Theologie* 13/1 (1997): 68.

[6]McCormack, “Beyond Nonfoundational and Postmodern Readings of Barth”: 69.

[7]McCormack, “Beyond Nonfoundational and Postmodern Readings of Barth”: 70.

[8]Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology*, xvii.

[9]Bruce L. McCormack, “What Has Basel to Do with Berlin? The Return of ‘Church Dogmatics’ in the Schleiermacherian Tradition,” *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 23/2 (2002): 172.

[10]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, eds. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 868.

J.P. Moreland's response:

Two Areas of Reflection and Dialog with Franke

I want to thank John for his thoughtful reflections about issues surrounding postmodernism, postconservatism and related matters. While I have a Th.M. in theology, I am primarily a philosopher, and my remarks to follow reflect my discipline. But it would be a mistake to think that they reflect only philosophical modes of analysis. I have long believed that the Bible was written for largely uneducated folk from various cultures, and in my view, a biblical view of reality, truth, knowledge and related topics turns out to be fairly commonsensical. Thus, if the reader discerns an orientation on these themes in the following, I believe that this orientation is a commonsense one, a biblical one, and a cross-cultural one. Specifically, it is not a uniquely modernist orientation, even if some modernists have expressed a similar standpoint. That said, I wish to raise two areas for reflection and dialog.

#1: Reality and its role in life and theology. I take it to be obvious that there is a real "external" world that exists and is what it is quite independently of any features of communities, conscious or linguistic acts, or conceptual schemes that may be directed upon it.[\[i\]](#) In this sense, reality is objective. I also take it that the Bible is filled with statements that implicitly or explicitly express this view of reality and the importance of knowledge thereof.

Two aspects of John’s writings make me wonder if he accepts such an understanding of reality and, if not, precisely what his view is. First, a number of things he says seem to imply that reality and its nature are, in ways hard to discern, social constructions.[\[ii\]](#) Thus, he says that one feature of the postmodern turn involves a transition from “a realist to a constructivist view of the world,” (23) that we “construct our world,” (23), that due to the flux of social interactions, words and linguistic conventions do not have fixed, timeless meanings and, thus, “language does not represent reality as much as it constitutes reality,” (26). John asserts that “rather than living in a prefabricated, given world, we live in a linguistically constructed social-cultural world of our own creation,” (74) that “we inhabit a socially constructed reality.” (138)

Prima facie, these assertions are troubling, indeed. At the very least, they are confusing. Does John really think that reality itself or the identities that are part of it in some way are created by acts of consciousness, linguistic practices and so forth? Clarity on this point would be welcomed. Perhaps all John means is that we do not have direct access to reality, so his point is epistemological and noetic, not ontological. But if this is what he intends, there is still an ontological problem with his thesis. I set aside for later a treatment of epistemological difficulties with this rendering of John's assertions. Regarding the ontological problem, we have simply been down this road before and it leads to intellectual, including theological disaster. It is widely recognized that Kant's replacement of the subject-object relationship (and it is individuals who experience and think, not communities, even if the former usually--deserted island scenarios notwithstanding--do what they do as part of communities) with the transcendental unity of apperception-noumenal distinction was inherently unstable, and gave way to a Hegelian position in which the noumenal world was set aside in favor of a "reality" constituted by the temporally unfolding categories of Geist. A reality to which humans have no direct access will simply become otiose.

This leads to my second concern. As I read him, reality plays no role in doing theology or in being its intentional object. This is brought out by two Frankean characteristics of theology. First, he tells us that "Christian theology is an ongoing, second-order, contextual discipline that engages in the task of critical and constructive reflection on the beliefs and practices of the Christian church..." (44) Doctrinal/theological formulations are forms of metadiscourse, second-order interpretations from the first-order commitments of the faith, viz., the primary stories, teachings, symbols and practices of the Christian community (104). Second, Franke's notion of indirect identity implies that God is revealed through a creaturely medium that is, nevertheless, not divinized such that God (and presumably other realities) remains veiled and "nothing is known about God directly through natural human perception." [iii] Given the nonfoundationalist character of our epistemic dependency on God, it follows that even this dependency does not remove the indirectness of our access to God or his self-revelation.

But why think that "epistemic dependency" has anything to do with nonfoundationalism or direct access to reality, including God, the nature of love, the properties of salvation and a host of other realities? In my knowledge of my wife, I am "epistemically dependent" on her willingness to cooperate with my seeking her and to disclose herself to me. But when she does, I have direct access to her speech, body movements, and it is arguably the case that I have intuitive access to her soul. When applied to knowledge of persons, modest non-doxastic foundationalism is quite suited for the sort of "epistemic dependency" one finds in such cases. Why think otherwise? Moreover, John's association of the issue of control or autonomy with foundationalism is a red herring. My (foundationalist) direct access to my wife's self-disclosure, her dairy, her clothing style, her habits, principles of how to know her (e.g., being patient and focusing on her) have nothing to do with trying to control her or the process of knowing her. Indeed, coupled with love and humility, by placing me in touch with reality, it is an essential source of knowledge that aids me in loving and serving her. What does control essentially have to do with any of this?

Further, there seems to be a use/mention confusion regarding scripture and other sources of revelation. Why should we believe that we have direct access to the primary stories, practices, tradition, scripture, and so forth and not their intentional objects? Intentional universals place us in direct contact with reality and, indeed, we experience every day of our lives acts of comparing those

intentions with things themselves.[\[iv\]](#) And if we do not have such access to scripture, much less its intentional objects, the meaning of scripture will become useless to theology and, in its place, we will have self-defeating reflective equilibrium that forever spirals in an unending circle in the dark. How is such a theological method consistent with the role of knowledge of reality, including God and spiritual realities, in scripture?

#2: Modest foundationalism and simple seeing. It is gratifying to see John acknowledge that his project is rooted in concern for classic foundationalism and not foundationalism per se.[\[v\]](#) This represents progress, and I hope that from this point on, our conversations about foundationalism can proceed without caricaturing the position as having anything essentially to do with the quest for certainty, control, human autonomy or any such things. It would also help if we could all keep ontological and epistemological order distinct. I think that John conflates these orders when he tells us that the foundation of Christian faith and theology is the Triune God.[\[vi\]](#) This is unhelpful and misleading. My wife and her acts of self-disclosure are the ontological foundations of my knowledge of her, but various forms of direct access to her and those acts are the epistemological foundations. Foundationalism is clearly consistent with such ontological foundations and the ontic dependency they entail. If John thinks otherwise, he needs to tell us precisely what sequence of argument takes us from such ontic dependency to a denial of foundationalism and direct access to reality.

But lurking in the neighborhood, there seem to be two sources of vagueness or even downright equivocation in John's writings that need to be cleared up. As I hope to show, these sources present a dilemma. When clarified, they are either quite true and sensible, but fairly innocuous and hardly fodder for the work to which John employs them, or they are serious issues sufficient to motivate John's project but, at the same time, pretty obviously false or, at the very least, inadequately supported by John.

The first source involves a distinction between accurate and exhaustive representations of a noetic object and knowledge thereof. John repeatedly tell us that because our outlook is limited and shaped by our circumstances, objective, universal, certain knowledge is impossible (28); that because we are finite, limited and without an ultimate vantage point, our methods and linguistic/conceptual tools are essentially shaped by and subject to the distortion of our situatedness (30, 42, 74); that because our knowledge is limited compared to God's, the infinite mysteries of God are by their very nature beyond the human capacity to grasp (75); that because there are no comprehensive, final theological formulations that can be secured or made certain and immune to revision, that those formulations do not provide direct access to the relevant realities nor do they escape the constructive, distorting influence of finite locatedness (74, 78, 79, 81); that because models are analogues and constructions, they do not provide an exact representation of phenomena (128).

How does it follow that because one does not have exhaustive knowledge of something, that one does not have accurate, and in this sense, exact knowledge, including exact representation of the object? Through sensation, introspection, eidetic intuition, memory, biblical study, and religious experience, I have had direct access to and accurate knowledge of, respectively, things such as apples, my own thoughts, emotions, beliefs and self, various de re and de dicto modalities (modus ponens; $2+5=7$; kindness per se is necessarily a virtue), that I grew up in Missouri, biblical truth (that love is patient) and the associated intentionalities (the property of love itself exemplifies the second-order property of kindness), and God's presence and guidance. From the fact that I can see the apple

only from one location, how does it follow that I do not accurately see its surface as it really is, and so on for the others listed? From the fact that I do not have incorrigible or exhaustive knowledge of these entities, how does it follow that my knowledge is distorted or not exact/accurate? And if it does follow, how could John or anyone else have the foggiest clue that it does? Wouldn't assertions to this effect be self-refuting? It seems that to have a basis for thinking that my alleged knowledge of something is distorted, I must presuppose I can know the thing itself veridically and compare my distortion with that knowledge.

I may be missing something here, but the more extreme understanding of these assertions seems clearly false and, moreover, does not lead to epistemic humility but to defeatism and discouragement. And it seems that John needs this stronger claim for his project to be intellectually motivated. The more plausible interpretation (while accurate, knowledge is limited and defeasible), while true, is simply inadequate to substantiate a rejection of modest foundationalism, a correspondence theory of truth, an ability to be directly aware of truth itself and occasions when objects are as we represent them to be, and an acknowledgement of direct access to reality. Again, if John thinks otherwise, perhaps he can help us understand how these things follow from the finiteness of human subjects.

As I see it, the second source gets at the fundamental issue at the core of this entire dialog regarding postmodernism, postevangelicalism or postconservatism. This issue is whether or not there is such a thing as "simple seeing," direct awareness of reality. To get at this question, I want to begin with what I shall call three grades of noetic involvement. Let us use "situatedness" to stand for all the relevant finitudes of our cognitively relevant linguistic acts and acts of consciousness. So understood, "situatedness" includes things such as the social, cultural, linguistic, spatio-temporal, and tradition-bound factors that characterize most of us.

Ranging from more to less extreme, there are three ways to take such situatedness. First, there is constructivism according to which the object, either whole or in a relevant aspect, is created by the mental act. I set this notion aside because I have discussed it above in connection with John's understanding of reality. Second, there is epistemic closure according to which in one way or another there is no direct epistemic access to intentional objects. Whether due to the notion that language or a surrogate stands between the subject and such objects, or whether due to some other factor, epistemic closure entails that there is no such thing as simple seeing or knowledge by acquaintance; rather, all seeing is either indirect seeing as or seeing that, and that "everything is interpretation." [\[vii\]](#) Finally, there is what may be called attentive influence according to which situatedness may influence and even distort knowledge by acquaintance or propositional knowledge of an object, but direct access is still possible and available for subsequent adjustment of conceptual or propositional judgments.

It seems to me that John embraces and, indeed, needs constructivism or epistemic closure for his theological method, but that attentive influence is what is actually the case regarding human subjects. At the very least, evidence cited on behalf of the former two grades of noetic involvement neither entail nor provide any grounds whatever for rejecting the last grade, and I believe there is much to be said in favor of attentive influence. Three issues are central to defending attentive influence. First, as Scott Smith has pointed out, from children through average folk to specialists in a field, we all regularly experience what Edmund Husserl called fulfillment structures in which we 1) compare our concepts/thoughts to things in themselves via direct access and 2) thereby adjust—verify, disconfirm,

clarify—the former. [\[viii\]](#) This cognitive success is not limited within the bounds of sensation. It obtains though out the range of cognitive practices mentioned above (e.g., introspection, memory, eidetic intuition). Indeed, people count on this success in living their lives, and those whose views deny such fulfillment structures will sooner or later conduct their lives, theorizing and so forth as though they are available, whatever they say.

Second, advocates of all three grades of noetic involvement should have a plausible theory of the relationship between mental judgments (conceptual and propositional) and the role they play in acquaintance with reality, especially in light of the cognitive successes cited above. It is precisely the lack of such a theory that renders constructivism implausible because no clear sense can be given for exactly how a mental (or linguistic) act directed upon an object creates that object or its various properties. I am unfamiliar with any place where Franke provides such a theory for either constructivism or epistemic closure. Perhaps he could clarify his views on this matter.

On the other hand, a very straightforward and powerful theory is available for attentive influence. [\[ix\]](#) The account may be briefly provided by beginning with a case from ordinary life. One day a missionary spoke in the seminary chapel, and without telling us where they were taken, he showed a set of slides from a culture he had visited. He asked us to list on paper everything we saw. After we were finished, he spoke a while, and then put the slides up again and asked us to start with a fresh sheet of paper and list everything we saw this time. Interestingly, people's second list was virtually identical to their first one. Why? Because people tend to look to confirm what they already see and believe rather than adopt a fresh perspective and launch out from scratch. Over time, people fall into ruts and adopt ways of seeing things according to which certain features are noticed and others are neglected.

I'm not claiming this is a good or bad thing. I'm simply noting that it happens. I suggest that situatedness functions as a set of habit forming background beliefs/concepts that direct our acts of noticing or failing to notice various features of reality. Depending on various factors, such situatedness may yield accurate or inaccurate experiences and beliefs. It's not that we cannot see reality itself. In fact, through effort we can look at things from a different perspective and further confirm or disconfirm our previous viewpoint. Habit-forming beliefs do not stand between a person and reality as do glasses. Rather, they habitualize ways of seeing and thinking which, through effort, can be changed or retained, hopefully on the basis of comparing them with reality itself.

Finally, I believe an advocate of epistemic closure will engage in self-refuting assertions sooner or later and, indeed, some things John says come perilously close to being self-refuting: (1); all such information (about the living center), whether it be positive or negative, is not really information, but always either dogma or self-criticism (2); we cannot speak of God (3); the finite cannot comprehend the infinite (4); the truth is that there is Truth, but not for us, only for God (7); there are no comprehensive views (8). [\[x\]](#) I fear that the self-refuting nature of such claims can be avoided only at the price of a vicious infinite regress or a circle/web of assertions cut off from reality.

I close with a suggestion and a concern. I believe we can all join forces in calling for humility, in rejecting Cartesian anxiety, in criticizing modernist control and arrogance, in finding a powerful place for faith, spiritual experience, creaturely dependency and the Holy Spirit's work in knowing without embracing the more extreme claims mentioned in this paper. The same goes for the scandalizing nature of the Word of God, the legalistic, ugly nature of abuses of rationalistic doctrinal

certainty when such is not available, and in providing room for situatedness to be constantly before us in our work. I just don't see why the extreme claims above are needed for embracing these desiderata.

Now a concern. Christianity is exploding in unprecedented ways outside the Western world, and signs and wonders are being performed by average believers precisely because these folks know what they know by direct acquaintance with the power and nature of the Kingdom as it is in itself, and with the spiritual world as it is in itself. The sort of theological claims made by John will simply be set aside as irrelevant for Third World Christians. They simply know better. It's not that, having absorbed modernism, they are overly confident in reason. They've never heard of modernism. Rather, they just know what they know, and the power of their faith and deeds for the kingdom are reflections of that knowledge. In the Western world, theology has become an increasingly marginalized field of study whose practitioners largely speak to themselves and which is hardly given any notice by intellectuals in other disciplines, and this is precisely because of the influence of postmodern thought whether in its Barthian or Frankean incarnations. What is needed if theology is to recapture its role as queen of the sciences is well stated by Tom Morris:

[T]he Judeo-Christian religious tradition, is not just a domain of poetry, imagery, mystical transport, moral directive, and noncognitive, existential self-understanding. Interacting especially with the philosophically developed tradition of Christian theology, [I] join the vast majority of other leading contributors to contemporary philosophical theology in taking for granted theological realism, the cognitive stance presupposed by the classical theistic concern to direct our thoughts as well as our lives aright. It has been the intent of theologians throughout most of the history of the Christian faith to describe correctly, within our limits, certain important facts about God, human beings, and the rest of creation given in revelation and fundamental to the articulation of any distinctively Christian world view. In particular, reflective Christians throughout the centuries have understood their faith as providing key insights into, and resources for, the construction of a comprehensive metaphysics.”[\[xi\]](#)

John may believe that his views are not inconsistent with theological realism. If he does, I could use clarity as to how this could be. Unless such is provided, I fear that theology, under Frankean-style influence, will continue to be, indeed, increasingly become more marginalized from the broader intellectual conversation raging around us. Alas, it will fall to philosophers of religion and classically or analytically trained philosophical theologians to carry the ball forward, and that would a loss for us all.[\[xii\]](#)

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[i] I set aside questions about the ontological status of artifacts. I take these to be constituted by various intentionalities and social/authorial roles, but these intentionalities/roles, and the objects that “realize” them are themselves objective features of reality.

[ii] John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2005). Page numbers in the text refer to this volume.

[iii] John Franke, “Nonfoundationalism, Truth, and Knowledge of God,” delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, November 16-18, 2005, p. 5.

[iv] For an analysis of Edmund Husserl’s understanding of the role of intentional universals and eidetic intuition in direct access to intentional objects, see J. P. Moreland, “Naturalism, Nominalism, and Husserlian Moments,” *The Modern Schoolman* 79 (January/March 2002): 199-216

[v] John Franke, “The Nature of Theology: Culture, Language and Truth,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. by Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos, 2005), p. 210.

[vi] John Franke, “Nonfoundationalism, Truth, and Knowledge of God,” p. 7.

[vii] James K. A. Smith, “Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? A Response to the ‘Biola School’,” in Penner, *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, p. 218.

[viii] Scott Smith, “Post-Conservatives, Foundationalism, and Theological Truth: A Critical Evaluation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (June 2005): 359-361.

[ix] For a more thorough analysis of the ontology of mental acts relevant to knowledge, see “Is Foundationalism Passé? An Analysis of Post-Conservative Epistemology,” by Garry DeWeese, J. P. Moreland in *Constructing a Center: Evangelical Accommodation in a Post-Theological Era*, ed. by Justin Taylor, Millard Erickson, and Paul Kjoss Helseth (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2004), pp. 81-107.

[x] Page numbers in this sentence refer to John Franke, “Nonfoundationalism, Truth, and the Knowledge of God.”

[xi] Thomas V. Morris, “Introduction,” in *Divine & Human Action* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 3.

[xii] I wish to thank Scott Smith for helpful insights on an earlier draft of this paper.