

“This is Most Certainly True!”
Common Sense, Real Interpretation of the Bible

A Review Essay On
What Does this Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation
In the Post-Modern World

By Pastor Tim Rossow
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“This is Most Certainly True!” Common Sense, Real Interpretation of the Bible

A Review Essay On *What Does this Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation In the Post-Modern World*

By Dr. James Voelz

Introduction: *What Does this Mean? or This is Most Certainly True!*

When I begin to share my thoughts on the problems with post modern hermeneutics most of my fellow pastors do not take long to get this sleepy look in their eyes or they seek to change the subject as quickly as possible. Good for them. This means that the average pastor and scholar in the LCMS could care less about post modern hermeneutics and hopefully have therefore not allowed postmodern principles into their exegesis. However, when a hermeneutics professor from one of our seminaries writes a book sub-titled *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post Modern World* and many of his citations are to post-modern thinkers, it is time for us to pay some attention.¹

This book is written in a style that is very thick with linguistic jargon that leaves many asking *What does this mean?* It is certainly acceptable in scholarly circles to write books that reflect the jargon of a given discipline which may cause those outside the discipline to find it tough reading. However, we find it ironic that a work on understanding is confusing. I believe there is good reason why the book is confusing and that there is an easier path through the jungle of interpretation than the course charted by

¹ As I set out to offer a review essay on this book let me begin by saying that Dr. James Voelz can run exegetical circles around this lowly reviewer. I am not the biblical scholar that he is and so offer this review humbly. My interest and what little expertise I have is in doctrinal theology more than exegetical theology. In order to better understand the history of doctrinal theology I have done some serious study of philosophy. It is this interest in philosophy that has given rise to this review and not some false pretense that I am fit to critique Dr. Voelz's exegetical work. From another angle however, the very the problem is that Dr. Voelz **has run** circles around me and others with his book *What Does this Mean?* with a book ripe with postmodern jargon and confusing metaphysics.

Dr. Voelz. Thus we choose to characterize this review essay with another great, Lutheran, catechetical assertion *This is most certainly true* rather than the question that characterizes Dr. Voelz's work, *What does this mean?* Without a doubt, much of the confusion comes from the incredibly expansive jargon of linguistics. But more profoundly, I argue, the confusion comes from the rejection of a common sense philosophy of reality that is lacking in the language philosophers that have formed the basis of post-modern hermeneutics. It is vital that confessional Lutherans understand this philosophical backdrop if we wish to explore post-modern ways of thinking.

Dr. Voelz's book is confusing because it is dependent on what I will call the **matrix metaphysics** of modern philosophical hermeneutics versus the more traditional metaphysics of common sense realism. What we are calling matrix metaphysics (represented primarily by Martin Heidegger) teaches that there is no meaningful distinction between subject (rational man) and object (the things we know). Instead, all being is relative to all other being. Man's being is only known relative to everything around him and all the things around him are likewise only known or meaningful in comparison to everything else in existence. This means that our grasp of *what is real* is comprised of a web or matrix of relations. Thus there is no real firm thing/object that we can ever point to as real in and of itself. Consequently in terms of truth there is no firm ground to stand upon and no place to land where one can say this is true or real because everything is relative to everything else. This relativity of being is applied in postmodernism to hermeneutics and understanding as well. All of the interpreter's current perceptions are relative to all of his past, present or future perceptions and so understanding is never complete. In this matrix world we can never say this is what this sentence means, and thus we can never be so arrogant as to claim that this or that is the correct interpretation of a text, including our beloved scriptures.

In *Section II* below we will see that theologian Friederich Schliermacher was the *father of hermeneutics* and stood as a bridge between Hegel's dialectical philosophy and the matrix metaphysics of postmodernism. This quote from C. W. Christian's little book

on Schliermacher introduces us to the non-common sense, matrix view of reality in Schliermacher and those who followed.

Schliermacher begins his task with a psychological analysis of human existence. Contemplation of the natural world, he suggests, reveals a bewildering multiformity in which, nevertheless, each particular is bound to the rest in a dialectical tension. **Two moments coexist in everything** (emphasis added) that is: a moment of individuation, in which the entity is seen in all its unique particularity, as over against the “multiverse,” and a moment of participation in the whole of being. These two moments are held in creative tension in every positive existent. The dialectic of individuation and participation manifests itself in human experience as the awareness of self and world.²

This should sound like a bit of *gobbledy gook*. This is not plain, straight talk. We shall show below that once we have passed into Schliermacher’s two moments existing simultaneously, we are lost in the looking glass world of Alice and will not be able to get a straight answer about anything because any one thing can be two things. Postmodernity moves even beyond this. Schliermacher at least has the decency to still speak of both self and world. Postmodern metaphysics entirely collapses the world into the self.

Admirably, Voelz seeks to distance himself from this relativism that is a natural consequence of post-modern linguistics philosophy. However, we suggest that there is very little room if any, for delving into the world of postmodern hermeneutics. By the very definition of reality according to the matrix metaphysics, one step into the matrix is meaningless and useless. One must enter this world entirely if it is to be made sense of. It is like the time warp doorways that one sees on recent television science fiction dramas. By jumping through a portal, one enters into an entirely different time or universe. Once in this new world, there is a whole different set of rules. That is the way it is with the matrix metaphysics of postmodernism. One cannot go part way with it.

In *Section I* our review starts with a summary of Dr. Voelz’s approach to hermeneutics. That will give us enough of a foretaste of the matrix metaphysics to desire looking into the philosophical roots of this approach to reality. That search will cover modern philosophy (Kant, Hegel, etc.) in *Section II* and postmodern philosophy itself in

² Christian, C. W. **Friederich Schliermacher**. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1979. p. 50.

Section III. Section IV will present the traditional alternative model of understanding known as common sense realism. Finally, in *Section V* we critique Dr. Voelz's use of postmodern hermeneutics in light of the history of philosophy and common sense realism.

I. Dr. Voelz's Post Modern Approach to Hermeneutics

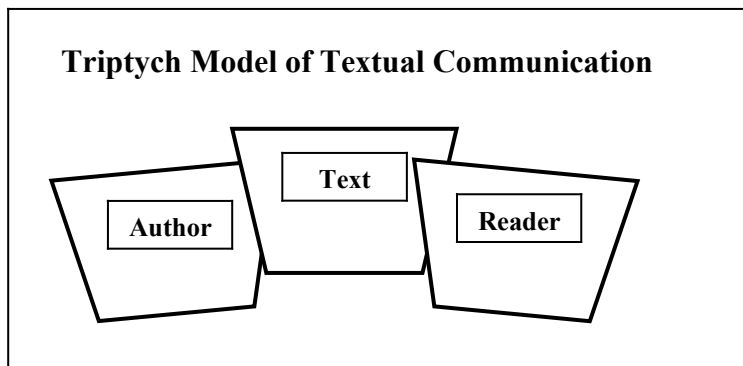
The Triptych and Matrix Metaphysics

It has become common-place in hermeneutical studies to refer to the triptych of author, text and reader. Dr. Voelz reviews this orientation in his introduction and endorses it. The notion is that in order to understand a text we must not only 1) do the traditional word studies (**text**) but also 2) do the necessary isagogics (**author** and his environment) and 3) consider the pre-understanding of the **reader** who is seeking to understand the text. Contrary

to Dr. Voelz it is our contention that confessional exegesis rightly pays attention to the *author* and *text* part of the triptych but it must reject most if not all of

the *reader* part of the equation. It is with the *reader* part that we have most of our issues with Voelz's use of postmodern hermeneutics. This is also where the notion of what we call *matrix metaphysics* is most prominent.

As mentioned above, *matrix metaphysics* is our shorthand for postmodernism's rejection of the traditional subject-object dichotomy (roughly equivalent to what we call common sense realism below) and replacing it with an understanding that reality or being is not some set of fixed objects waiting to be experienced and then categorized by the



knowing subject. Instead, reality or being is to be identified with what is currently before me which is understood only through all that I have experienced prior. If this is true and is applied to hermeneutics, then there is no such thing as a fixed text that can be objectively analyzed. Instead, each reader brings baggage that interacts with the text and somewhere in the intersection of text and reader there is understanding. This should seem quite alien to the reader unfamiliar with modern and post modern philosophy and to the man on the street because it flies in the face of our common sense experience of things. We call it matrix metaphysics because what is real is caught up in and is relative to everything around it. We will explain the historical genesis of the matrix metaphysics in the next two sections. For now, let us share a couple of examples of it from Dr. Voelz's book as he presents it in relation to the *reader* part of the triptych.

In the introduction Voelz speaks of the *reader* panel of the triptych in fairly harmless terms. For instance he states that the emphasis on the reader is to answer questions such as:

Who was to receive the text...What abilities did they have or need to understand the text? What abilities do **we** as readers need especially if we also are the intended addressees?³

But then in a later chapter things start to get a little dicey with the reader part of the triptych:

Perhaps better put, the reader's beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, ideas, experiences, etc., become part of the matrix for textual interpretation, so that nothing is interpreted in a text, unless it is part of a matrix with what she is as a person. **She is as it were a "text" herself – a complementary "second text,"** which is always a factor in textual interpretation. Therefore-and this is the basic point-**the interpretation of any given text involves in fact, two texts** – the given or "target" text (e.g. the book of Galatians) and as part of the matrix for understanding the target text...the so called "second text" of the interpreter.⁴

This should sound absolutely incredulous to the average confessing Lutheran. How can "I" the interpreter be considered a text to interpret when my goal is to understand the meaning of the text I am reading?

³ Voelz, James. **What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World**, second edition. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997, p. 18.

⁴ Voelz, pp. 208-209.

There are ways that this can be acceptable but they are either meaningless or trivial. For instance, this point could be understood to mean: *I need to set aside my personal bias in order to arrive at an objective interpretation*. But notice in this way of understanding the point, I am not viewing myself as a second text. I am in the way of the objective truth of the text. This is not what the post modern hermeneuticians mean when they claim that there are two texts to interpret i.e. the text and the reader. This takes us into the heart of the misguided matrix metaphysics. According to the postmodern hermeneutician, there is a metaphysical union between text and reader that gives rise to the meaning of the text. There is no longer an acceptance of the common sense truth that there is a distinction between *subject* and *object*, but it is believed by postmoderns that all things experienced as objects⁵ are actually a part of the nexus of my experience, and even bias how I will experience things in the future. This union of subject (knower) and objects (what is known) obliterates any chance of discovering objective truth in the scriptures or any other text because the only *truth* I might claim to find in a text is true only in the matrix of my experience.

That was a brief preview of how matrix metaphysics shows up in the *reader* panel of the triptych. Matrix metaphysics shows up in the *text* panel of the triptych as well. Ferdinand Saussure is the father of modern linguistics and a school of interpretation called Structuralism. He is cited frequently and positively in Dr. Voelz's book. He teaches that the meaning of words is arrived at **synchronically** and not **diachronically**. The point is that word meaning is not derived by studying the use of the word through time (*dia-chronos*). Instead, we must look exclusively at the way a word was used at a given time only (*syn-chronos*). Voelz says

⁵ This is the way postmoderns talk about objects i.e. we experience things *as objects*. They do not speak of objects as objects. They speak of them as *experienced as objects*. This is similar to the new way of talking about our savior's death on the cross. It is no longer called what it is, i.e. *his death on the cross*. Instead the postmodern's call it *the Christ event*. For them things are *experienced as objects*. They argue that it is wrong for us to actually think there are any real objects apart from the knower. There may be, but that is irrelevant because all there is to me are the objects of my past and present horizon. We explore the extreme subjectivism of this below.

Etymology and/or general meaning are no *key* to the meaning of words as used at given context at a given point in time.⁶

He also says

In fact, knowing etymology and etymological relationships may help one to remember the meanings of a word, *but* it is highly doubtful that it is a key to understanding the characteristics or components of meaning conveyed by that word in various contexts and at various times in the history of its usage.⁷

After reading this, one is tempted to throw away one's *Kittel*. Of course, *Kittel* is geared toward finding that one use in a given point in time but it also includes etymological insights that can be translated, albeit carefully, into homiletical *kerygma*. Indeed, Saussure offers a helpful corrective to etymology-based allegorizing but in the end, his notion of synchronic interpretation is an intratextual form of matrix metaphysics.

Saussure's thought gives rise to the structuralist approach to texts which ultimately led to narrative interpretation. Both structuralism and narrative interpretation put the focus on the matrix of the given text. Meaning is derived from context (matrix). The Confessional Lutheran certainly agrees that context is crucial for meaning but this does not mean that there is nothing to be gained from a *diachronic* study of etymology. We will show below that the way out of this over emphasis on the matrix of context is the traditional philosophy of common sense realism. Briefly, by way of a preview, what common sense realism teaches is that we apprehend the reality of everything when we know it and the words we choose to identify things represent this reality. Thus, as a word meaning changes through (*dia*) history, it is being connected by real subjects to their new apprehensions of real objects and experiences. The connection between two different but related uses of a word through history is based on the real apprehension of the being of the experience that leads to the given use of the word. This is done by real people who are able to make language bend to fit their purposes. But this bending is rooted in real experience and not just the contextual whim of the interpreter. So the etymology of a

⁶ Voelz, p. 110.

⁷ Voelz, p. 111.

word is the record of real epistemological experiences and not meaningless, relative history as Saussure claims.

This method of deriving meaning that we are proposing here is chock full of real being. It is incarnational if you will. So much of postmodern hermeneutics, if not all of it, is vacant of real being and is filled instead with mere intertextual relations concepts (Saussure), personal horizons (Gadamer) and subjective existential assertions (Heidegger). This is enough of a look at common sense realism at this point. We will continue it below. For now, let us highlight Dr. Voelz's efforts to distance his work from the subjectivism that we have identified in postmodern hermeneutics.

Dr. Voelz's Efforts to Distance His Thought from Postmodern Relativism

This review essay focuses on what we believe to be a major flaw in Dr. Voelz's book but there are certainly strengths in the book as well. The first part of the book is on text criticism. Text criticism is not really impacted by postmodern thought and so the opening chapter is free from questionable matrix metaphysics. In its essence, the last chapter of the book is also an admirable presentation of the confessional principle in Lutheran hermeneutics, although like the rest of the book, in its form it was rather awkward and obtuse due to the retro-fitting of post-modern hermeneutics into the Confessions.⁸ It is also important to point out that Voelz on a few occasions in the book seeks to distance himself from the radical version of post-modern epistemology that

⁸ Postmodern thinkers would claim that every era has a different approach to reality and language and so the writers of the Lutheran Confessions would be reflecting their own peculiar approach. We claim that the common sense realism approach supported throughout this paper was their approach as well as being the approach throughout much of the history of Christian theology. This jives with Lutheranism's aloofness toward philosophy. We believe that common sense realism is the least philosophical of all the epistemologies. It is common sense. (Luther's disdain for reason was limited to the use of Aristotle to support the medieval works righteousness. Luther did not reject the common sense distinction between subject and object and like all common sense thinkers he trusted that our use of words is rooted in a trustworthy experience of the world around us. Luther rejects Aristotle's ethics and anthropology but nowhere does he reject his epistemology.) Of course there are peculiar approaches to reality throughout the history of the faith that show up in biblical interpretation such as the Neoplatonism of the early Greek fathers and the tendency to allegorical interpretation among the scholastics, but the common thread or the view that we compare all of these to is some form of basic common sense realism. The modern and post modern eras have brought an extreme subjectivism into interpretation. Even the allegorical method with all of its faults is still based on common sense realism.

makes interpretation severely subjective. For example he rejects what he calls radical strains of postmodernism that claim that the meaning of any text is based on its recipient.⁹ There are other such statements in the book. But despite these disclaimers, as we stated above,¹⁰ it is impossible to use just a little of postmodern hermeneutics. Postmodernism's unique approach to being and reality gives a subjective cast to interpretation that disallows us from arriving at the truth that Christ claims to give us in his word.

Another positive in the book is Voelz's acknowledgement of the truth of common sense realism. At several points in the book he acknowledges that truth is a matter of correspondence between the mental world and the physical world. For example he says:

We said above that when we use signifiers in discourse, we apply them as labels, saying that the referent, i.e., what we are talking about – has characteristics which are congruent with the characteristics of the conceptual signifieds evoked by the signifiers in the mental world...Thus when I say something is literally a truck, all of the characteristics evoked by the word *truck* should correspond to the thing I am talking about.¹¹

In Heidegger's world the concept in my mind may have some connection to the object I am referring to but this does not come close to exhausting the meaning of the word I am using. It's meaning is tied to all my past experiences, all of the past experiences of the author, etc. The straight-forward view of a referent's meaning presented by Dr. Voelz in the above quote is inconsistent with the other postmodern matrix metaphysics that is included in his book.

Our bottom-line concern with a book like this is that most accommodations of philosophical systems by confessing theologians ultimately prove to be a matter of playing with fire. One cannot adopt part of the first principles of a given ideology and expect that there will not be other ramifications flowing from those first principles. Dr. Voelz denies the radical subjectivity of post modernism but he accepts an emphasis on the author and the reader of the text that leads to a hermeneutic that is open to relativism. Dr. Voelz works hard to not be a relativist himself but the first steps toward relativism are

⁹ Voelz, p. 92, footnote 15.

¹⁰ pp 3-4.

¹¹ pp. 168 – 169.

inherent in the ideology he is using. The use of historical critical terminology in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in the 1950's and 1960's led to the adoption of the movement's philosophy in the 1970's. There is a historical lesson to learn here. If history is any indication, the use of postmodern terminology in the 2000's leads us toward postmodern relativism in the next generation.

II. Philosophical Roots of Post Modern Hermeneutics

A few years ago many people were shocked that President Clinton could ask in a deposition, "What exactly do you mean by the word *is*?" This is symptomatic of an age whose intellectuals have rejected the subject/object dichotomy. *Is* is the predicate of existence or being. When something *is*, it exists. It is that simple. As a knowing **subject** I am capable of distinguishing other **objects** as distinct from me. I **am** and they **are**. In the world of matrix metaphysics things are not that simple and so it is asked *What exactly do you mean by the word "is?"* We will show in the next two sections how this sort of double-speak is possible given modern and postmodern metaphysics.

By metaphysics we mean that which grounds reality, i.e. that which is above or beyond (*meta*) physical reality. Metaphysics seeks answers to the questions about the structure of being. What gives me the confidence when I get up in the morning that when I put my foot down on the ground it will hold me up. Sample answers to this question will help to illustrate what metaphysics is. The common sense **realist** would claim that when I look at the floor my past experience of the real being of the floor and my conceptual knowledge of it's firmness would lead me to get off the bed. The **empiricist** would say that we have no rational grounds for confidence and would step on it only because of habit. The **existentialist** would call it a personal choice of will and cite the need for bravery in the face of the anxiety of each new day. All of these are metaphysical approaches.

For the postmodern thinker, of which Bill Clinton is a prime example, that which is, is what is currently passing through the horizon of my experience including and

primarily focusing on the existential possibilities present there. In addition, the only meaningful access I have to reality is through the web of language available to me in my culture which is highly dependent on my past experiences of the culture's language. The only way you and I can speak in common about what is real is through your horizon of experience and your idiosyncratic use of the language. Understanding this, it is not surprising that the postmodern president asks *What do you mean by "is"?* The distinction between subject and object that is so key to our use of the word *is*, is lost in this world. The combination of the critical philosophy of Kant, the idealism of Hegel and the Existentialism of Hiedegger have led to this postmodern world of thought and so we set out to understand the genesis of this way of thinking.

Modern Precursors of Postmodernism: Kant and Critical Realism

A brief refresher on classical metaphysics will help pave the way to understanding the moderns. We begin with the metaphysical realists, Plato and Aristotle. A realist teaches that one's confidence to place the feet on the floor trusting that the floor will hold one's weight is to be found in one's ability to apprehend some universal concept of the floor. On Monday I see the floor below my bed. I put my feet on it and have sensory knowledge of it and that sensory knowledge gives rise to a mental reality called a form or idea of the floor. On Tuesday when I see the floor again, first thing in the morning, I know what it is because of this mental form I have of "floor."¹² The difference between Aristotle and Plato as to the source of this concept is huge but need not overly concern us here. Basically, the difference is that Plato considered these concepts to exist in and maybe even come from a non-material world beyond the mind, a nether region somehow open for access to the human mind. Aristotle taught that these concepts arise from the material world. The main point is that they both believe that knowledge is grounded in a conceptual world in the mind. These concepts are **real** and really reflect the things that

¹² We are speaking of a sort of primal experience here. Of course, we step on the floor each day due to habit. We have presented in a primal form for the sake of illustration.

we know. From here let us leap ahead to modern philosophy where we quickly move from the outside world to the internal world of the mind.

Most students of postmodernity point to Rene Descartes as the culprit or hero, depending on one's perspective, who introduced the turn towards the subject into western thought. The ancients and medievals grounded truth in a combination of reason and the external **objective world**. Descartes turned into the **subjective self** for that ground with his famous *cogito ergo sum*, (I think therefore I am). Contrast this with Aristotle and Aquinas who located objectivity in our ability to know the substantial form that inheres in each thing and even Plato who located the objectivity of our knowledge outside of ourselves in forms and essences that resided in a parallel world.¹³ We do not have the space to detail Descartes' use of his *cogito* but put briefly, he used this so called indisputable truth (*cogito ergo sum*) as the major premise in a line of syllogistic reasoning that under-girded his whole system of thought.¹⁴ In other words he approached reality from the inside out, starting with the knowing subject and moving to the outside world. This subjective starting point has remained a hallmark of Western thought ever since and plays a huge role in postmodern thought.

Kant continued this grounding of truth in the self through what is called the *critical turn*. He turned the corner heading away from the metaphysics of the ancients and medievals. The Enlightenment emphasis on science and measurability challenged philosophers to give up on Plato's and Aristotle's forms and substances which were perceived to be ethereal and non-scientific.¹⁵ If Plato and Aristotle's forms and substances

¹³ Plato's version of this is known as idealist realism, i.e. that there is a real ideal world that grounds our knowledge. Aristotle's version is close to what we are referring to as *common sense realism* in this paper, i.e. each thing in the objective world has its own inhering essence that is *real* and is knowable. It is called *common sense* because it squares with the everyday unreflected notion that the external world is identifiable and knowable by us.

¹⁴ ? Deduction works through the syllogism constructed of a major and minor premise which lead to conclusions. These conclusions then become new major premises which lead to more conclusions. This works indubitably with logical entities. If you wish to apply it in the real world of things you need at least one major premise that no one can doubt. This is how Des Cartes' *cogito* works. It is intended to be the original major premise in a long line of deductive reasoning about the world that grounds truth.

¹⁵ This is where the word *metaphysics* begins to take on negative connotations. Ever since the enlightenment it has come to connote that which is unreal or non-material. In the last generation it has become associated with new age spirituality and even the occult. This is regrettable. Metaphysics is not

were not allowable because of their immeasurability then the grounding of truth would have to come from somewhere else. Kant followed Des Cartes' interior move and did it one better. Descartes built a deductive system around his first principle of the self. Kant did not arrive at truth through deductions from an indubitable starting point but instead claimed that objectivity was built into **the way** we know.

According to Kant, all knowers are equipped with certain categories. When sense perceptions come to a knower they get channeled through these mental categories. For instance, the reason I can speak objectively with other knowers about the croquet mallet moving the ball toward the wicket is because both of us, and all knowers for that matter, function with the category of causality. For Kant it is as if our brain has mail slots in it for such things as substance and causality. Each sense perception gets put into its appropriate mail slot as it comes into the knower.¹⁶ For Aristotle, objectivity was possible because all knowers sensed the form of the table that inhered in the table itself. The objectivity resided in the thing. For Kant the objectivity resides in the knower.¹⁷ Kant's subjective turn has had even greater lasting appeal than Descartes' view because it was not built upon logic but upon an empirical process of knowing reality. Traditional metaphysics was *critiqued* and turned outside-in, thus the name *critical turn*.

Before leaving Kant it is significant to note the family tree of philosophical hermeneutics appended below. One of Kant's ideological heirs is Edmund Husserl. Husserl is one of the leading proponents of phenomenology, which is key to the development of Existentialism. Part of the fallout of Kant's critical turn is that the actual being of things becomes off limits to reason (the *ding an sich* or *thing in itself*). Aristotle proposed that we know the essence of things and by this knowledge we are able to

about ethereal things. It is the discipline that seeks the ground of all that is real, both physical and spiritual. Our point in this paper is that true metaphysics is common-sensical and real. The ground of our knowledge inheres in the sense world.

¹⁶ The *mail slot* metaphor is the insight of Dr. Robert Charron, professor of modern philosophy, St. Louis University.

¹⁷ One might argue that there must also be a category for the divine and spiritual that would ground theology. Kant kept God out of the realm of truth and put him in the realm of aesthetics or feeling. (It would be left to Hegel to posit such a category, so to speak, for God. See more on that below.) The modern emphasis on the subjective and emotive in religion comes straight out of this train of thought in Kant.

ground truth. Kant grounds truth not in the knowledge of the essence of the thing but in the common way in which we know the phenomena of the things we know (dimensionality, color, etc.) Thus all that is left for philosophers to study is mere phenomenon. The actual being of things is bracketed, i.e. off limits. In their focus on phenomena, these Husserl and the phenomenologists study at length the issue of how we experience things. Heidegger, the leading existentialist that we will consider below, takes a cue from Husserl's phenomenological study of how we experience things and proposes that being actually is the point of it all. However, being is not to be understood as some unique characteristic of things (subjects and objects) but is always being-in-the-world or being that is relative to all that is experienced by self-conscious being (i.e. human being). Heidegger is an existentialist and as such attempts to get being back into the picture, the being lost by Kant and the phenomenologists, but it is a vacuous being that is not simply my real being as subject but my relative being-in-the-world.

Let's take stock of what has happened thus far in our brief run through modern philosophy. We have turned away from the objective world into the world of the subject with both Descartes and Kant. Following Kant we have gained an emphasis on the empirical world which then leads to the phenomenologist's emphasis on the appearance of being rather than being itself. This lack of emphasis on being leads the existentialists (existence = being) to refocus on being. That takes us to Nietzsche and Heidegger. But we are jumping ahead of ourselves. We need to consider the idealism of Hegel before we get to existentialism because it was Hegel's idealism that the first existentialist, Nietzsche, was reacting against. Hegel is also important for this study because he inspired Schliermacher, the father of hermeneutics.

We should also recall at this juncture why we are making this run through modern philosophy. One cannot understand what is postmodern without understanding what is modern. Postmodern hermeneutics is as much an outgrowth out of modernity as it is a reaction against it. The subjective turn of Kant and Descartes flows somewhat naturally into postmodernism's near extinction of the subject.

Hegel and His Influence on Schliermacher: the Beginning of Matrix Metaphysics

It is important for us to understand Hegel if we are to make sense out of postmodern hermeneutics because some of his rationalist moves find their way into the postmodern age, e.g. 1) the dialectical method of thesis / antithesis / synthesis which is still operative in the postmodern hermeneutician H. G. Gadamer (see below) and 2) the notion of an all encompassing Geist that inheres in all rational being which is at the heart of Schliermacher's claim that hermeneutics involves seeing into the mind of the author. While Kant was giving us his mental categories that are still tethered to the real world, G. F. W. Hegel was developing a rationalist metaphysics that reflected the subjective turn of Descartes but had very little tether to the real world. Rationalism is the belief that reality holds together by some sort of extra-physical logical structure. Often times it is the Divine that is at the root of the rationality of the universe for a rationalist. In Hegel's case, it is a Divine dialectical logic that makes sense out of reality.

For Hegel that which is truly real and the ground of all things is the Divine, Absolute Spirit (god, geist) that originally existed as One, apart from anything else (thesis). According to Hegel the One then divorced Itself from Itself by creating the physical universe (antithesis). The Divine (thesis) no longer exists by itself apart from creation but it inheres in creation (antithesis). History then is the process of the Divine making its way to full realization of itself at the fulfillment of the creation at the great *eschaton* (synthesis). The final stage of the history of reality will be when the Divine makes its way back to itself (synthesis) and the physical world is destroyed and all that remains is the Divine in the form of the Spirit. This is the ultimate dialectic of Thesis / Antithesis / Synthesis.

Most students are acquainted with Hegel's dialectic as it applies to history on a smaller scale but few are aware of this all encompassing dialectic that Hegel believed explained cosmic and divine history. All of physical history is made up of lesser examples of this dialectic but all of history is the great unfolding of the master Dialectic.

Notice how this roughly approximates the Christian Trinity. The age of the Father is the Divine by itself. The age of the Son is the Divine divorcing Itself from Itself in creation, i.e. incarnation. The age of the Spirit is when God makes his way back to Himself in eternity. One might ask why the Divine puts itself through this dialectic. According to Hegel's dialectic, experience is better than the lack of it. This is the romantic character of Hegel's thought. Purity is not as developed or rich as experience, even if the experience involves pain and suffering. Thus it makes sense (rationalism) that the Divine would divorce itself from itself in creation, so that it could undergo pathos and come out the other end as richer through experience. Schliermacher, the father of hermeneutics and the one who paved the way for post-modern thought, was also a Romantic and accepted Hegel's dialectical metaphysics.

One of Schliermacher's principles of interpretation was that in order to accurately interpret a text, one had to get into the mind of the author. This was more than just a poetic expression for Schliermacher. He and the other romantics, felt that the Divine is in all rational creatures. This is a Hegelian notion. This is why Schliermacher can say that hermeneutics is all about pre-knowledge or pre-suppositions. Schliermacher, borrowing from Hegel held that *the* Supposition ultimately comes from the Divine Spirit in us all. This Divine that is expressing itself in the physical world is present in all rational creatures. Thus, the great figures of history are merely acting out the rationality of the divine. The Divine is Mind and Rational. The Divine inheres in the created world (the antithesis of creation), particularly in rational beings. Therefore the expressions of rational beings will reflect the One all-encompassing Truth. For Schliermacher then, every rational author is expressing divine, absolute lasting truth. Rationalistic hermeneutics is optimistic that a rational interpreter who of course also participates in the Divine, is able to discover the (divine) truth in any text. Heidegger and Gadamer are not so overtly rationalistic and metaphysical but draw on this rationalism when they speak of the potential for self discovery in texts.

Notice also that the dialectic presents reality as a matrix of interrelated parts. Hegel did not necessarily deny the subject-object dichotomy. It is just that in such an excessively rationalistic system, the everyday simple acts of subjects upon objects pale in comparison to the greater dialectic going on of the Divine unfolding itself in the course of history. From this point on it seems as though all 19th and 20th century thought, with the exception of logical positivism, is somehow cast in some sort of matrix metaphysics where all being is related to all being.¹⁸

Of great illustrative purpose to understand matrix metaphysics is the fact that Karl Marx was also a Hegelian. Marx was more than an economist. It is the Hegelian dialectic that stands behind his critique of capitalism. He too, like Heidegger and Gadamer, applied the dialectic without a divine or spiritual aspect. Hegel's divine spirit divorced itself from itself and we get the physical world thus the physical world is an expression of the divine. Marx¹⁹ taught that when the worker makes something he is creating it in a Hegelian sort of way. Just as the physical world is an expression of the divine for Hegel or actually contains the divine, so too the product made by the worker is an expression of the worker, or actually *contains the being* of the worker and thus it is unjust for the capitalist to take it from him and sell it for a profit.

This little side trip into the mind of Marx is helpful because it is such a great preview of what happens in post-modern thought. Marx's socialism grows out of the romantic rationalism of Hegel and others in the 17th and 18th centuries. To say that the object crafted by the worker is a part of him is an economic example of the obliteration of the distinction between subject and object. It provides a clear view into the matrix metaphysics that carries over into postmodern hermeneutics. To say that there are two texts present in every interpretation (i.e. the text of the author and the reader as his own

¹⁸ This is the philosophical basis for the extremes in the ecological movement, animal rights and comments such as the former first lady's ideology of *it takes a village* and slogans such *unity in diversity* and *reconciled diversity*. These are not just unreflected opinions. Such thinking grows out of the romantic world view that considers everything to be an expression of the one, inclusive being. It is muddled thinking and cannot have a place in the world of confessed truths.

¹⁹ It may seem odd that we are talking about Karl Marx in an essay on biblical hermeneutics. As proof of the significance of Marx one only need check the bibliography of hermeneutics texts and you will see such books as J. P. Miranda's *Marx and the Bible* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1974).

text) is in the same metaphysical ball park as Marx's claim that the worker and his labor are one. Further proof of these apparently odd bedfellows, i.e. Marx and postmodern metaphysics is seen in the fact that Dr. Voelz even lists in his bibliography a pastoral theology text that is done with this Hegel/Schliermacherian/Marxist socialist worldview.²⁰ It is not accidental that Marxist dialectic is a common theme among post-modern thinkers.

Nietzsche: Taking the Subjective Turn to New Depths

Nietzsche is the third significant philosophical precursor to postmodernism. In the appended family tree of philosophical hermeneutics, Kant is the critical branch, Hegel is the rationalistic branch and Nietzsche represents the existentialist branch. Nietzsche was opposed to both traditional (Aristotle) and critical (Kant) metaphysics which taught that truth is guaranteed by the consistency of our mental concepts of things. For Nietzsche there is no consistency in knowledge, only individual experiences. He totally blows away the subject-object dichotomy by suggesting that it is only the experience of the individual thing that is real and genuine. My experience of this table in front of me brings me closer to the "truth" of things than any mental concept I might have of "tableness."²¹ Stanley Grenz summarizes it this way:

In Nietzsche's view the world is made up of fragments that are totally different from one another. In constructing concepts, however, we overlook the fact that no two things or occurrences are exactly the same...conceptualizing robs reality of its multiplicity and destroys the original richness and vitality of human experience.²²

Nietzsche goes on to claim that knowledge and truth are human constructs. Truth is merely a function of the language we use. This had a huge impact on philosophical

²⁰Voelz, p. 342. I am referring to Dan Browning's book *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, (Fortress, 1991). 4rr55555I have read Browning's book and it ought not to be referenced in a confessional text without some sort of annotation. It consists of pastoral theology according to the Marxist-socialist view of justice. It is a very confusing text because it is rooted in the matrix metaphysics we have been discussing in this paper.

²¹ Heidegger and Gadamer continue the emphasis on this notion of the immediate. Truth and reality are not out there in an objective way. Truth and reality can be found only within the my personal and current horizon. For more on this see the sections below on Heidegger and Gadamer.

²² Grenz, Stanley J. **A Primer on Postmodernism**. Grand Rapids, Mi.: William B. Eerdmans, 1996, p. 89.

hermeneutics. What Nietzsche spoke in fiery reaction against the Enlightenment optimism toward human reason and truth, twentieth-century thinkers turned into dogma and peddled it as matter of fact. Again to quote Grenz as he speaks of Nietzsche and other Romantics:

In one sense we can place Nietzsche in the company of the Romantic philosophers who preceded him...As post-Kantian idealists, they looked to the self rather than the flux of diverse sensations and experiences for the means to organize the world. When the self organizes the world, it actually organizes its own experiences. Consequently the Romantic philosophers concluded that the result is identical with the self. They maintain that through this world-organizing activity, the self actually discovers itself and in the process overcomes the subject-object distinction.²³

Here is another manifestation of the matrix metaphysics. Reality is discovered in the efforts of the self-organizing experience. Reality is a matrix of world and self. Reality is not out there to be discovered. It is created by the self or is an expression of the self, trying to make sense out of existence. In the hands of the existentialists, the point is that it is in my acts of self-will that meaning is created or discovered.

Let us use an example close to home for confessing Christians. Let us say that I encounter a text that tells the story of our Lord's death and resurrection. In the traditional metaphysics of subject and object we would understand that we have discovered a claim to truth outside of our experience. The Holy Spirit would convict us of the truth of this claim and based on it would create faith in our hearts. For the Romantic such as Nietzsche and for the modern hermeneutician, there is no *out there* to be discovered *per se*. There is an out there but our dealing with it is not a matter of assessing truth. It is a matter of creating constructs to deal with experience. Thus the Holy Spirit's role would be to enable me to find my way through the trials and tribulations of life inspired by the example of authentic existence in this person Jesus, or at least in the text about this person Jesus. Truth is not what the text says. Truth is in what I do with the text.

Nietzsche leads us even farther away from truth than the Romantics from which he came. At least the Romantics believed that art was a way toward creating truth.

²³ Grenz, p. 90

Nietzsche claims that we have no true access to the world. All that we have are our perspectives on the world. Truth is a fiction.

Heidegger: Making the Subjective Turn Metaphysical

Kant turned western thought away from the being of things. According to Kant we only know the empirical phenomena of things. Hegel tried to jettison western thought into the hyper-space of not only knowing the real being of things but beyond that, his system of thought taught that all rational beings are participating in the unfolding of the Divine Mind that makes up all that is truly real. Then there is the romanticism of Nietzsche. For him there is no Hegelian Divine Geist guiding history. There is no Kantian brain in each knower that is guaranteeing the consistency of experience. The only thing that counts for real is the will of the individual pushing itself into the random occurrences of experience. Out of this Kantian/Hegelian/Nietzschean cauldron comes the German existentialism of Martin Heidegger.

Traditionally philosophy's chief subject matter had always been what is real. Kant cut philosophy off from what is real and Nietzsche cut man off from himself. Out of this vacuous approach to being, came the reaction of the existentialists. Existentialism is born out of the horrors of the two world wars, the realization that science and technology would not be able to solve man's problems and the great divide modern philosophy created between man and the world around him. If there is no access to real being then all that is left is the individual will asserting itself. Some existentialists developed pessimistic philosophies out of this context, such as Jean Paul Sartre who developed a nihilistic and atheistic philosophy of existence. Heidegger's version of existentialism on the other hand, is more optimistic.

For our concerns in this paper the key element of Heidegger's thought is his notion of being-in-the-world. In an ironic sort of way Heidegger builds his thought on the Kantian criticism and limitation of metaphysics but then spins out a thoroughly metaphysical approach to reality. Remember, Kant had ruled out any rational

understanding of metaphysics. For Kant, we know only the phenomena of the material world because we are equipped with various categories in the mind for processing this knowledge. We cannot know such noumenal things as being. Following Kant, Heidegger has no illusions of knowing being-in-itself but he does propose that being is the fundamental subject matter of philosophy.²⁴ How can this be? How can being be off limits to knowledge and yet be the subject matter of the highest form of thought. It has to do with Heidegger's version of being which is so crucial to understand because it is the basic view of being of much of postmodern thought.

Being for Heidegger is *being-in-the-world*. I do not have my own being *per se*. I am not an object but a will by which I assert my being. Being then is the collection of all of my memories in the world as they relate to the current moment and the possibilities of the future. We do exist but Heidegger argues that we only know ourselves **in relation to the world**. Thus, we cannot speak of being-in-and-of-itself. But we can speak of being-in-the-world. (He would later go on to state that we only know ourselves in relation to the world through language.) Heidegger criticizes the common sense tendency to consider being a *what* or a thing that we have. This is the age-old subject/object way of viewing reality. Only in existing do we understand existence. It is meaningless to look at reality as an object because things have no meaning without me there to interpret them. This is a new fangled version of the old philosophical puzzle: if a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, did it make a sound? If I perceive a tree in the forest and then walk away, is it still there. Heidegger would say it may be but that is irrelevant and is not a fundamental issue of being. The issue for being here is that I **was** there and perceived the tree and that moment it was within the horizon of my being-in-the-world and therefore had existential significance. This is the extreme subjectivism of the late modern and postmodern eras. In contrast, for the common sense approach, the first issue is that the tree exists. It's being does not depend on its coming into my horizon of being. For sure it does not mean much to me when it is not in my horizon of being but my subjective

²⁴ This irony is the basis of the book **Heidegger and Aquinas, An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics** by John D. Caputo, New York: Fordham University Press, 1982.

experience does not jeopardize its being. The application to biblical interpretation is striking here. The text of the scripture means something in and of itself whether or not I am there to bring it into the horizon of my being. It may not mean anything to me personally until I read it but my reading of it does not grant it being.

For Heidegger, being is not something that we have but it is something we are cast into. There never is the *cool hour of reason* in which we reflect on ourselves. From our first moments of self consciousness, we are cast into the world. (Notice the romanticism here.) Reality then grows out of what you assert by your will in this world you have been cast into. Your being-in-the-world is opened to new and more possibilities through each encounter of your being-in-the-world. Here is the matrix metaphysics. This is the matrix metaphysics of existentialist being. I am known only in regards to the decisions I make in this world I am cast into. For Marx it was materialistic matrix of worker and his work. For Heidegger it is a matrix of me and my being-in-the-world. Gadamer and other postmodern hermeneuticians will move from this notion of being-in-the-world to the notion that any text cannot be understood by itself as an object by a stand alone subject, the reader. Instead, a text only becomes a text when it comes into my world.

There is more than a grain of truth in this. Texts do open up new worlds to us. They do expand our horizons but for the believer who confesses truth, the prior question is not the existential one, i.e. how does this text expand my horizons of being? The prior question is what truth is contained in this text? Heidegger and Gadamer and the like, believe that reality is somehow contained in the encounters that we have that expands our existential horizons. Reality is dialectical for them. Because reality is dialectical and there are no separate subjects and objects apart from being in the world, objective truth is impossible. Meaning would never be found in objective, timeless confessional truths. Meaning is found in the dynamic of each of us being-in-the-world. Again I stress, this is an entirely different and alien way of thinking about reality than what our common sense tells us.

Now you can see how this applies to hermeneutics. As a matter of fact, the analysis of being is hermeneutics for Heidegger. All of life is hermeneutics because meaning is discovered in the unfolding of being-in-the-world. My whole existence can never be frozen and analyzed for truths. Life cannot be analyzed but only experienced. Thus, the great hermeneutical principle is this very truth. All of life is hermeneutics because all of life is continued discovery of being-in-the-world, which is the only kind of being there is for self conscious beings.

III. Post Modern Philosophy and Approach to Meaning

The above sketch of modern thought leading up to postmodernism was one of the lengthier sections of the paper because it is in this period that we find the groundwork for the matrix metaphysics that in our view makes postmodern hermeneutics so antagonistic to confessional theology. We shall now proceed to see how this matrix metaphysics shows up in two leading postmodern thinkers: Hans Georg Gadamer and Ferdinand Saussure, both key figures in Dr. Voelz's book.

Hans Georg Gadamer and the *Art* of Interpretation

Gadamer is concerned with overcoming the alienation that is common to man. This alienation he sees can be broadly defined as the *angst* of the existentialists. Gadamer draws deeply upon Heidegger and was student of the German existentialist. Narrowly speaking the alienation that Gadamer addresses is the age old distinction between subject and object. Traditional metaphysics separates I the knower from the objects of the world which I know. Gadamer also laments that the technological revolution has only deepened this alienation. This is quite simply a carry over from romanticism.²⁵ If the 18th century

²⁵ All of this talk of alienation is Marxist in nature. The reader may have wondered why we spent time above highlighting the outgrowth of Marxism from Hegelianism. It pays dividends when we seek to understand a postmodern like Gadamer. Marx created the notion of the alienation of the worker from his work. This notion is still prominent 100 years later in the thought of postmoderns like Gadamer.

romantics did not tell him so with their matrix metaphysics, the man on the street would never realize that he is estranged from the objects of his experience. For Gadamer, Hegel was right in considering reality to be dialectical. He was just wrong in assuming that the great dialectic was between the Divine and the world. For Gadamer, Heidegger got us beyond this faulty notion of alienation from the Divine by proposing that the only meaningful way to understand being is as being-in-the-world and not being as it relates to the Divine. Gadamer takes this and other insights from Heidegger and applies them to interpretation.

Alienation is a concept that originates in Hegel, is given a materialistic twist in Marx and then is given an existentialist turn in Heidegger and Gadamer. For Hegel, alienation is at the heart of the dialectical logic (thesis/antithesis/synthesis) The alienation of antithesis is behind every smallest act in history and is the logic of the grand scale of the history of the cosmos as Divine Spirit is unfolding itself through creation (see above). The less grand and secularized Hegelian dialectic is also a key to the way Gadamer makes sense of reality and life. He describes life as a series of concepts (theses) that are then refined by experience (antitheses).

In her book *On Gadamer*, Patricia Johnson illustrates this daily dialectic by giving the example of a young person following a career path.²⁶ He or she has the concept of teaching and sets out with that concept in mind to become a teacher. However, it is not until the student actually experiences the job of teaching that the concept is truly refined or rehabilitated. Here is being-in-the-world. Nothing is ever complete because all concepts or experiences can be further rehabilitated. Thus my being is never a finished work.

To jump ahead of ourselves a bit, a text functions in this same way. Let us say I know the concept “x” and then read further about “x” in a text. The text refines or rehabilitates my understanding of “x.” Common sense would tell us that the truth about “x” is the truth about “x.” It may be that our original concept was true or it may be that

²⁶ **On Gadamer.** Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2000, pp. 16-17.

our reading of the text brought us the truth about “x” or it may be that the truth about “x” is in another text. Or it may be that I need to enrich the understanding of the truth “x” with further examples of it. Common sense teaches that the truth is out there waiting to be apprehended. Gadamer and his postmodern ilk would say that truth is somewhere in the whole experience of thesis (my concept) and antithesis (the text I read) and further, it is open to any future experiences I might have. Truth is dialectical for postmoderns.

Gadamer comes to many of these conclusions by studying the experience of fine art. Gadamer begins his great work *Truth and Method* with an analysis of how we know. He considers logic and science as inferior ways of knowing that encourage alienation because they maintain the subject/object distinction. Scientists dissect and analyze their subject matter. The things they know remain separate from them. Let the scientists do what they will, holds Gadamer, but that ought not to be the way we understand understanding. Fine art pieces, on the other hand, have the ability to draw us into another world through which we recognize things about ourselves. The correct way to approach art is not to view it as an object, but instead to be caught up in it, as when one goes to the movies or the theatre. When I go to a good and provocative movie, I come out having learned something about myself. My concept of me and the world is rehabilitated by my entering the world of the play. Knowledge is not a matter of collecting pieces of information and cataloging them. True knowledge is a matter of having a refined experience. Notice romanticism rearing its head again. Whatever is formal or able to be cataloged is bad. That which is experienced directly and intuitively is good. We do not deny that good art can communicate knowledge and truth but until we can catalog it and identify it, any insight gained from aesthetic experience is mere subjective intuition.

The study of history is also important for Gadamer in overcoming this tendency to objectify things because history takes us beyond ourselves and demonstrates that we come into this world already outside of ourselves. This gets a little tricky in Gadamer. Confessional Lutherans are used to the notion of presuppositions. The identification of presuppositions is actually a product of philosophical hermeneutics stemming from

Schliermacher and coming through Gadamer among others. For Gadamer and most other postmoderns, life is all about interpreting and interpreting includes presuppositions or prejudice (pre-judging). For Gadamer human existence is as follows. Science, technology and the basic existential *angst* of the modern world have alienated us from the world. Our scientific view towards existence causes us to view our experience of life as some sort of experiment in which we are operating on life rather than living in life and experiencing it directly. Thus we are one step removed from existence as the traditional subject of metaphysics is removed from object (subject/object dichotomy). But the fact of the matter is according to Gadamer, that my existence is tied to the world around me. I am not independent being but being-in-the-world (Heidegger). My only experience of me is me-in-the-world. From here it is only a short step to understanding the false notion that every act of interpretation involves both the author's text and the text of my being-in-the-world (see our criticism of Dr Voelz above, pages 5-6). If my being is caught up inextricably with the world then any time I read a text, it is all right there with me.

It is also a short step to Gadamer's notion of pre-judging (prejudice). Because my being is being-in-the-world, and because the world includes traditions and historical consciousness, I am always experiencing the world with the collective traditions and historical record of the world. Notice how similar this is to Hegel's rationalism. For Hegel you cannot understand the world apart from his dialectical logic of thesis (the Divine), synthesis (the Divine divorced from itself via the physical cosmos) and antithesis (the consummation of history when the Divine returns to itself). Like Marx, Gadamer offers a secularized version of this. Instead of this divine drama being the pre-key to understanding, Gadamer simply proposes that the pre-key to understanding is the collective consciousness (history) of man. If there is such a thing as truth, it will be reflected in this collective tradition and history and obviously it will change through time as history adds new reflections to a culture's collective consciousness.²⁷ This is similar to

²⁷ One's personal history is a major theme in postmodern hermeneutics. We will not devote much space to it in this paper. Pages 204-206 gives an indication of how Dr. Voelz has incorporated the postmodern notion of history into his text. There are some disconcerting comments such as *accuracy or innerancy is not the issue here...Bad or even deceitfully written history is still history...*

the very first truth of hermeneutics, provided by the father of hermeneutics, Schliermacher, which says that to understand a text you must get into the mind of the author (see p. 19 above). Schliermacher felt this was possible because of his Hegelian view of reality that the Divine is in all rational beings (because the Divine divorced Itself from Itself and in the Antithesis stage is found in the minds of all rational beings). For Gadamer, something similar happens, only it is not some metaphysical *Geist* that guarantees this but it is simply the historical consciousness of a culture or people that provides the common backdrop for a unity of experience. Reality is not just matrixed to my being-in-the-world but is also matrixed to language.

The final point we shall consider from Gadamer's thought is the role of language. For Gadamer, language serves the objects of our experience by allowing them to come into meaning or even existence. In other words, if I do not have a name for something I experience, do I really know it? The written text then is a vehicle for bringing things into existence. It does not exist for the author's sake or the reader's sake but has a life of its own because words have the power to bring things into existence. Even though the text has a life of its own, it is still dependent on the horizon of language. It cannot bring life to something apart from the system of language.

By way of critique, it will be seen below that this view of language turns things upside down. Language does not uncover meaning. Meaning is in the objective world. When I see the cat jump into the window sill, I am apprehending that through my mind. Granted, I need words to express what I apprehended if I wish to tell my wife that the cat is in the window, but in this case the words carry the meaning, they do not create it or uncover it. Words are merely conventions we create to reflect the being of experience that we know mentally. We will continue with this line of critique after our discussion of Saussure.

Ferdinand de Saussure

Saussure is not a postmodern *per se* (1857-1913) but his linguistics is behind much of what is postmodern and he is cited frequently by Dr. Voelz. Saussure never

published but his students published the notes from one of his courses entitled *Course in General Linguistics*.²⁸ It remains today a standard in linguistic studies even though it was published in 1916.

Saussure proposed a Copernican type revolution in linguistics. For ages, language was understood to be formed as a reflection of how things were in the world, even to the point of words being associated with things on the basis of the sounds of the things they stood for (onomatopoeia). Word usage was understood to be developed organically and by evolution through time. Meaning would then be derived through a study of how a word was used through history. Saussure taught that every culture and age has a unique use of any given term. It was a waste of time as far as he was concerned, to study a word's use through history since what was meaningful was how it was being used in this time and place. He held that there was no guaranteed connection between a word's use now and previously. There may be a connection but it is trivial since the way in which the current age and culture defines the word is key.

Saussure also taught that every word is defined by the words in its immediate context. This is his notion of *difference*. It also reminds us of matrix metaphysics. We shall argue below that words derive their meaning from the things or actions they signify from the real world. Saussure says that words derive their meaning from the matrix of the other words in a given context. Saussure proposed that language was a coherent system peculiar to a given culture in a given time. This is why his thought is called *structuralism*. It is the one given, coherent structure of language in a given group of speakers or within a given text that provides meaning. He uses the terms *diachronic* and *synchronic* to describe these two approaches. The diachronic view believes that meaning is derived through (*dia*) a study of the use of a given word across history. The synchronic approach simply studies the use of word within (*syn*) a given culture at a given time. This is a huge move and one that we argue, jeopardizes our ability to arrive at truth. Language becomes primarily a social phenomenon in Saussure's approach.

²⁸ Quotes are from the English translation published by Open Court Books, Chicago and LaSalle, Illinois, 1986. The page numbers in brackets are from the original Payot edition from 1916.

Another approach that Saussure uses to uncover meaning is to discuss the existence of linguistic laws.²⁹ Prior to Saussure's day it was understood that word meanings and linguistics follow certain laws. He argues that laws are imperative and general (apply to all situations), otherwise they would not be laws. He believes that his study of language has revealed that words and other linguistic matters change haphazardly and accidentally and thus are not to be understood on the basis of imperative and general laws.

Saussure is probably right that linguistics does not change according to laws. But the heart of the matter of interpretation is not about words or linguistics. Words are mere conventions chosen to represent the concept of reality as we experience it. You and I both experience the cup on the table in the same way. It is truly and really apprehended in our minds. Linguistic critics like Saussure like to point out that the example of the cup is too simple of an example. Consider the more complex example of a golfer practicing out in the field. You and I see golfer and in so doing we are apprehending the true reality of the golfer, the field, etc. Let us assume that you know the word for *golfing* and I do not. I ask you what he is doing and you tell me he is *golfing*. We now can speak meaningfully about golfing. The word could be a different one. That would not matter. We still have experienced what we call in English, *golfing*. Language takes on meaning through experience. Yes the words are conventional and they can be changed and they may change without rhyme or reason, but the meaning of the words is rooted in the experience of the real thing called golfing. This is how we come to know things. Saussure's critique of linguistic laws is only significant when it comes to how we establish the words and syntactical arrangements we use to describe the reality we experience.

Yes our language sometimes shifts in haphazard ways.³⁰ Everyone admits that words are chosen pretty much by convention. But these new uses are still just conventions and their meanings are derived from experience. I see a car and say that is a

²⁹ Saussure, pp. 90f.

³⁰ For example, since the middle of the last century, the word *cool*, which referred to the temperature of something, started to be used in the sense of *great*, or *acceptable*, etc. as in *what a cool car*.

cool car. After a few uses of the word *cool* in this way, my friend figures out from experience that I am using the word *cool* in a new way. The fact that this happens slowly, haphazardly or even imperceptibly, does not change the fact the new meaning is derived from experience.

The above example of the convention *c-o-o-l* shows a new use of a word that is not related to another primary conventional use of it, i.e. *c-o-o-l* can be used to refer to the temperature of a thing or its desirability. In this case one simply needs to know the two different and unrelated meanings for the convention. Many changes in a word's meaning evolve through time and are not unrelated. For example, in preparation for the sermon for Advent 3, B I did a word study of *joy*. From Kittel I learned that its original use in classical Greek culture was to describe the emotion of anticipation for welcoming the gods. This meaning through (*dia*) time turns out to be quite helpful for understanding the term's use in the New Testament. In John 3 the Baptist uses the word *joy* to refer to his presentation of Christ to Israel. In both cases the same term has similar experiences associated with it. What this shows, based on the common sense realist approach to meaning is that a given term in a given time is loaded down with meaning from the past.

Rather than rejecting this truth as Saussure apparently does, we find that it brings much enlightenment to the interpretive process. Take any entry in Kittel's Greek wordbook and what you have outlined is the history of experiences of reality that are translated into words. Each generation has packed into a given word their experience of reality. Thus, when we stand in the pulpit and preach, it is quite useful to understand how a Greek vocable has been used through history because the final Koine, Greek New Testament use of it is enriched by its previous meanings. Vocables are not relative, conventional things used only in a given culture. They carry with them all the rich experiences of the past cultures that have been passed down to us. They are loaded with experience. It is rather incarnational isn't it? Words carry freight. They are not just mere conventions. To read in John that Jesus Christ is the *Word* of God made flesh means that our experience of Him in the inscripturated word brings us the truth about God. Words

carry meaning. Jesus is the word from God. He tells us how things are between us and God. If words did not carry meaning then the Holy Spirit would be foolish for moving John to call Jesus a *word*.

This not only involves the incarnation, it also concerns the doctrine of creation. Common sense realism allows for the assertion that God (subject) created the world (objects). Those who matrix subject and objects together into one whole, like Hegel for example, claim that God is the world. This turns history into the unfolding of the divine. History is not static and objective for Hegel but is Geist (Divine Spirit) moving through time. Rational beings then, who by their rationality participate in the Geist, do history by seeking to understand what stage Geist is at in mediating Itself in the world. Gadamer takes a cue from Hegel, secularizing this and says³¹ that true history done by beings seeking understanding is **not** a matter of objective analysis but is a matter of thoughtful mediating of history into contemporary life. We can never go back objectively in time but we can let the play of history intersect with our horizon and somewhere in the middle of that intersection is historical understanding.

Not every postmodern thinker espouses the Hegelian view of creation and metaphysics, not even Gadamer. But Gadamer's world of thought and most postmoderns is more akin to this pagan view of God and world being one than to the traditional scriptural teaching of the distinction between subject and object, God and world. Here is another place where the confessional theologian must keep her distance from postmodernism or risk losing the scriptural teaching of creation. Losing the scriptural teaching of creation typically leads to the loss of the doctrine of forensic justification. If God and world are somehow one, then salvation can take place apart from the cross and can take place inside of me, since I carry in me the very being of God.

Before leaving Saussure and structuralism it is worthwhile to spend a moment with a truly postmodern thinker, Jacques Derrida. Derrida practices the postmodern hermeneutics of deconstruction. He takes a cue from Saussure concerning the

³¹ *Gadamer*, p. 25.

importance of the context (i.e. that there is no meaning apart from the matrix of the context and that all meaning is nothing but context) but then takes it one step further and leads western culture further away from a concern for what is traditionally understood as the truth. He proposes that the layers of context are infinite. Saussure at least held that the layers of context are limited by a given culture. Derrida suggests that words are at best metaphors and can never be precise because of the issue of context. Not only do the words in a given paragraph depend on each other, they also depend on the use of those same words in the culture. (This is the point to which Saussure took meaning.) Derrida then goes further by pointing out that each reader of the text has his own culture so to speak because his experiences are not going to be identical to everyone else in the culture. In addition, every time the reader learns a new word every other word in his context takes on a slight adjustment in meaning because of this new knowledge because after all, all words are matrixed with all other words and experiences of those words. This results in an unending spiral as one might imagine. Thus Derrida says that interpretation is a matter of metaphorical discoveries. The text is not a bearer of meaning and truth but is merely a playground for my latest lexicographical experience.

This is the hopeless hall of mirrors to which the subjective turn of Descartes and Kant necessarily leads. It took a couple of hundred years to arrive at the destination but it was irreversible as long as one begins with the abolishment of the subject object distinction. Common sense realism's emphasis on our ability to truly know things distinct from ourselves is the pathway out of this constantly changing world of metaphors and fun house mirrors. Like Saussure, Derrida is only giving up on what is common sense to us all. Even Galilean fishermen know this profound philosophical truth. Words are conventions but they are tethered to our ability to experience reality. Call it what you will, let's agree on whatever convention we wish, but once we settle on one, we will both be able to communicate truly about the cup that we are experiencing on the table. This is a fitting point in the paper to present the common sense realist approach to meaning. We

have gotten bits and pieces of it above. We now bring it all together in one summary package.

IV. The Common Sense Realist Approach to Understanding

A Brief Outline of the Common Sense Realist Approach to Understanding

The common sense realist approach to understanding has varied forms. What we are presenting here is based on the realist metaphysics and epistemology of Aristotle as refined by Thomas Aquinas. Despite its ancient and medieval roots, it is also a very modern approach to reality and knowledge. Many of the early neo-Thomists³² of this century taught and practiced this approach, including Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Joseph Owens, and others.³³

The following six points summarize the common sense realist approach to understanding. *1) All knowledge begins with sense perception.* There is no knowledge that is **not** rooted in sense perception. Rather than undermining the faith this actually is the point of the Christian faith. Once mankind sinned, God was inaccessible by sense perception and so he sent his Son in sense perceptible and crucifiable flesh and blood. As Luther taught, all that we know about we know through Christ. This is not to deny that we do not know abstract concepts. For sure we know abstract things but they are always

³² We qualify this as early Thomists of this century because the middle and later half of this century has spawned theologians like David Tracy who are considered neo-Thomists but are far different in approach than the earlier Thomists of this century. Tracy and the later neo-Thomists approach reality from the standpoint of process thought, which is a far cry from the more static metaphysics of Aristotle and Aquinas.

³³ Being what I thought was a good Lutheran, in my early philosophical studies I kept a safe distance from this approach thinking that all reason was a *whore* particularly reasoning connected with Aristotle. The more I read of Luther and about Luther I began to realize that Luther's critique of Aristotle was about Aristotle's ethics and anthropology and not about his metaphysics. I do not know of a single text in which Luther criticizes Aristotle's metaphysics. Instead, we find Luther upholding the common sense distinction between subject and object. Luther's approach to reality is quite common sensical particularly when one considers the centrality of the incarnation in his writing and preaching. Christ has truly come in the flesh and because of his blood sacrifice, the sins of the world are pronounced to be forgiven (forensic justification). Grace is more than just an attitude in God. God's grace towards us is based on the empirical incarnation of His Son.

abstracted from sense perception. The human mind is an incredible thing. It is able to abstract many levels beyond simple sense perception but no matter how abstract the concept is, it will always be ultimately traceable to sense perception. **2) *The sense world is knowable by us.*** Common sense tells us that the objects of the world are knowable by us. When I look out the window I see the trees in my front yard and know them. I could be momentarily fooled for sure, if someone had glued a huge photograph to my window that looked like my front yard. Common sense realism does not claim that the mind cannot be fooled. But, given a closer inspection, I would quickly come to realize that it is a photograph and not my front yard. Notice, however, that even in this example I am still recognizing my front yard, albeit from a photograph and in two dimensions, which two dimensions are still perceived by sense perception. **3) *The human mind knows the objects of sensation through concepts in the mind.*** The human mind is configured in such a way that it duplicates what it sees in reality. The mental duplicate is not the exact same tree from my front yard but it is a real thing this concept and its reality is drawn from the tree and reflects the actual tree. The reality of this concept and its duplication of the corresponding thing in the sense world gives rise to the name *common sense realism*. **4) *Words are then applied to the things of sense perception so that we can communicate with each other.*** These words are mere conventions. It takes practice with the language to see what word a given culture is connecting to a given sense perception. **5) *We are able to recall concepts in our minds even if we are not having a sense perception of a given object.*** This allows us to have dialogue about things without pointing to them. **6) *Understanding happens then when two people communicate and they are both using the correct words to identify the concepts they are thinking of in their minds.*** People may use words incorrectly or the receiver of the communication may wrongly connect a word to a concept. Common sense realism is not some fool proof road to understanding. What it is though, is a time proven way of describing how we come to know and understand, which corresponds with the common sense way we think about these things which is far different from the *twilight zone* approach of matrix metaphysics.

An example should help to illustrate this. Let us say we are sitting in my office, I at my desk and you next to my credenza. I ask you to hand me the Bible that is next to you on the top of my credenza. You see two Bibles there, an NIV and a ESV. You then hand me the NIV which is closest to you. I then tell you what I really meant was the black and gold ESV Bible and so you take back the NIV and hand me the ESV. It took a little extra verbage, but true communication took place and I got the desired end result, the ESV in my hand.

The success of this communication is not based on rocket science, but on common sense realism. Before I ask you to hand it to me, I have already spotted the Bible and have had a sense experience of it. I am well acquainted with the Bible because I have had many sense experiences of it before. As I glance at it my mind is matching up the current experience of it with the numerous past experiences of it. In so doing I am comparing real concepts with real concepts. That is why I am able to match them up in my mind. I make a somewhat unspecific request of you that did not use language adequate enough to direct you to the Bible I had in mind. With a few more verbal hints from me, I was able to stimulate more reality-based concepts in your mind, so that successful understanding took place.

How this Approach Differs from Matrix Metaphysics

In the days of ancient Greek philosophy the matrix approach to being and the classic subject/object approach competed with each other. Plato and Aristotle basically upheld the classic distinction between subject and object but Plotinus and the Neoplatonists held that being is in flux. Since the days of Hegel, Schliermacher, Kierkegaard and the other romantics, idealists, and existentialists, there is very little credence given to the classic distinction between subject and object. Nearly all of the major philosophical movements that have effected Christian theology in the last two centuries have in some form or another bought into what we have described as matrix metaphysics. That being is somehow in flux from object to object flies in the face of

common sense. It is mere poetry. Recall the example above of Karl Marx. It certainly carries poetic value to say that the laborer invests himself in his work but to think that the metal bumper fashioned by the auto worker at his press literally participates in his being flies in the face of common sense. This paper has elicited a great deal of sweat and anxiety out of me but never would I imagine that my existence, being or reality is somehow in it. If that is the case then what am I? Am I this paper or am I still me? More to the point, discourse would be impossible. If nothing ever remains what it is but everything is participating in the one flux of being then we could not distinguish one thing from the next. I would be indistinguishable from this paper I am writing. This is exactly the point that we arrive at in postmodernism with Derrida's hall of mirrors.

An Example: The Resurrection of Christ

A brief review of five different approaches to the understanding the resurrection of Christ will be instructive.³⁴ We will consider 1) the classic common sense realist approach, 2) the Kantian critical approach, 3) the existentialist approach (both modern and postmodern), 4) the Saussurian approach and 5) the radical postmodern approach.

1) The Classic Common Sense Approach to Understanding the Text of the Resurrection (e.g. Aristotle, Aquinas)

We read in the Gospels that Christ rose from the dead. We have sense perceptions of dead bodies and living bodies and of things being raised up (i.e. being made upright, not necessarily being made alive again). Combining these concepts we are able to conceptualize Jesus of Nazareth being raised from the dead. This is not to say that common sense realism proves that he rose from the dead. That is a matter of faith. The point of this exercise is to show how each approach interprets the text of Christ's resurrection. We understand what the text is saying because we have had real experiences of the concepts that stand behind the words of the text.

³⁴ These are caricatures drawn from the fundamentals of each viewpoint and should not be taken as *verbatim* descriptions by the various thinkers.

2) *The Kantian Critical Approach to Understanding the Text of the Resurrection*

A Kantian approach to understanding the words *Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead* would be very similar to the common sense realist approach. Because all human knowers are commonly equipped with the categories of understanding that allow us to experience space, causality, dimensionality, etc., we are able to conceptualize the claim that Jesus rose. The difference between Kant and Aquinas is that the latter taught that what was being apprehended in the mind was the actual being of the object known and thus the reason you and I can have common understanding of a concept is because of the object.³⁵ For Kant, the mind is contributing the commonality that allows us to discourse rationally about the object. Both you and I have common categories of understanding in our minds that allow us conceptualize the object in the same way. The end result is the same because we perceive an outside world in the same way. However, we are perceiving it totally through mental categories. Kant's turn away from the objective world into the subjective world of the mind, added to Descartes' *cogito* (see above) started a subjective landslide that is still not done and by the looks of things may not run its course until the risen Lord returns again in judgment.

3) *The Existentialist Approach to Understanding the Text of the Resurrection* (Kierkegaard, Heidegger/Gadamer)

Most likely Soren Kierkegaard, who is commonly considered the first existentialist, believed in the factual resurrection of Christ. He did so however, in an unacceptable, anti-rational, fideistic way. It is acceptable to be fideistic but not in an antirational way. We are saved by faith for sure, not by reason. But the *fides qua* is delivered to the saints through common, ordinary rational means. Christ is the *logos* of God, i.e. God's word to the world. It is not an antirational word. We understand the

³⁵ This is not to mention the radically different approaches Aquinas and Kant took toward the Christian faith. Aquinas accepted the truth of divine revelation. Kant would suspend judgment of the truth of the Bible calling it a matter of feeling (aesthetic). We are here only speaking of how they would view sense perception.

meaning of the sentence *Christ died to pay for the sins of the world* because we have the rational powers to make the conceptual connections to reality of *Christ, died, sins*, etc. Making that statement apply to us by faith and believing it in the sense of putting our trust in this God who did this comes only by the power of the Holy Spirit. Kierkegaard was reacting against the extreme Hegelian rationalism of his day and described faith wrongly as a leap into an unknown, irrational abyss. Faith is not irrational. It is somewhat arational because of the Holy Spirit's action but it is definitely communicated (*fides qua*) within the rational forms of language. This is the same sort of thought that goes into the confessional teaching of the inspiration of the scriptures. The Holy Spirit did not bypass the rationality and personalities of the writers of Holy Scripture. Rather, he made use of these natural gifts.

So Kierkegaard's view of the resurrection is that it is an antirational truth. It is existential because it calls for us to respond not in a rational way but with a great and mighty act of our will (existence) against our better judgment. Heidegger and Gadamer have positions rooted in Kierkegaard's existentialism but with a decidedly modern and postmodern twist.

Recall that Heidegger no longer accepts the subject/object dichotomy. All that exists is my personal existence at a given moment, what he calls *being-in-the-world*. For him, there is no longer a knower (subject) who comes to know the things of the world (objects), there is simply the *me* that finds itself in the current horizon of being that is present to me. I am indistinguishable from what is present to me. What is present to me is an alienated world (Hegel) that is a collection of random incidents of other being-in-the-world.³⁶ This is the matrix metaphysics. There is no such thing as an abiding truth if this is what reality is like. The only truth possible is my asserting myself into this matrix of possibility. Since there is no abiding self (subject) from the past, all that is left is for me

³⁶ The atheistic existentialist Jean Paul Sartre arrives at this same point but simply gives up in despair. Heidegger at least posits that we can and should assert ourselves into the possibilities of future being-in-the-world.

to assert myself into the present. (This is Heidegger's version of Kierkegaard's leap.) As I foist my will into the world I am asserting my existence.

How would this apply to the resurrection? Here we can turn to one of Heidegger's followers in the world of Christian theology, Rudolf Bultmann. I am not sure that Heidegger ever commented on the resurrection but Bultmann did and did so following the principles of Heidegger's existentialism. The facticity of the resurrection is not an issue in this school of thought. What matters is that this idea of the resurrection is such an overwhelmingly strong thing to encounter as one is-in-the-world. It is such a challenging idea about one man's being (Christ) that it inspires others to make decisions of hope against the potential hopelessness that alienated being-in-the-world can present. So, like Kierkegaard, one is given the opportunity through the notion of Christ's resurrection to take a leap of faith and make one's own existence meaningful. There is nothing here of blood atonement or vicarious satisfaction. Those are unreflected ideas that need to be critiqued by the matrix ontology of being-in-the-world. Those old fashioned doctrines, according to the existentialist, are mired in the subject/object dichotomy making God the Father and Christ out to be manipulated objects rather than the agents of possible authentic being that they are.

An excellent example of this type of interpretation comes from Paul Ricoeur, who stands in the line of Heidegger's and Gadamer's existentialism of being. Commenting on the exodus of Israel from Egypt, Ricoeur says that this approach to understanding and interpretation does not just concern itself with Israelites being freed from the Egyptians but also with a *certain state of wondering which is lived existentially as movement from captivity to deliverance. ...The double meaning aims here at deciphering an existential movement, a certain ontological condition of man.*³⁷ We disagree. If there is an acceptable double meaning to the exodus it is because elsewhere the scriptures identify one. It is not because the ontological condition of man is one of *angst* and

³⁷ P. Ricoeur, "The Problem of Double Meaning as Hermeneutic Problem and as Semantic Problem" in *The Conflict of Interpretations. Essays in Hermeneutics*, p. 66, as quoted in A. Thisleton, *The Two Horizons*, p. 121.

meaninglessness. This is the condition of man but just because a group of nobodies who are slaves to the mighty Pharaoh get freed under some unusual circumstances, that does not automatically equate to good news to me because I have the condition of ontological slavery. The second meaning comes from St. Paul who speaks of Christ as Israel reduced to one and because the book of Hebrews tells me that Israel's history was intended by God to point to Christ's sacrificial death to forgive me of my sins. The text of the exodus **means** that God rescued a particular people. It does not carry a second meaning of rescue for all who are ontologically challenged. The text of Hebrews **means** that God's original rescue of that peculiar people was a part of his plan to bring salvation through Christ not only to the peculiar people but to the gentiles as well.

4) The Saussurian Approach to Understanding the Resurrection

The structuralist would handle the resurrection in any number of ways. First of all, the structuralist would speak of a different resurrection for each of the four different Gospel authors. Each Gospel community would have their own coherent language system that would be untranslatable into another culture. The alien culture would have its own idiosyncratic use of language. It becomes a text that can only be understood in the readers context. There would be no hope of recovering the original meaning because language does not translate through time. Each new generation will use a language that is meaningful to it and it alone. This is not a matrix of being as in Heidegger. It is none the less a form of the matrix thought. The reason each culture would not be able to understand the account in the same way as the original developers of the story is because all words are relative to each other. Unless one culture used all the exact same words as another and only the exact same words and came to understand them in the exact same sequence, there would be differences of understanding of the words of the story. For Saussure, there was at least the continuity of a given language community. In our final example not even that is present.

5) *The Extreme Postmodern Approach to Understanding the Resurrection*

Thankfully, Dr. Voelz does not make much use of what we are calling the extreme version of postmodernism but as we argued above, a little bit of matrix metaphysics leavens the whole bunch. Once you say that even just a little *part* of me is contained in something outside of me, all sense has been lost. If you are not distinctly you and the objects outside of you distinct unto themselves then I cannot refer to either you or them because all things are simply a part of one big being. Even those postmoderns who do not practice some sort existential matrix but only speak of the matrix of language, still have lost sensibility. Reality stands outside of words. Words are only conventions that we choose to stand for the things we experience. To speak of coherence among a set of words for a given culture is to speak of nothing because words do not mean anything apart from the things they stand for. Meaning only becomes possible when we seek to choose words that refer to a common thing experienced or when we seek to understand what thing a given culture was referring to when it used a given word.

The extreme postmoderns, such as Jacques Derrida, are not structuralists but deconstructionists. Stanley Grenz defines deconstruction this way: *the use of certain philological or philosophical assumptions to launch an assault on logocentrism* (the belief that words can somehow transcend experience and communicate some sort of fact or truth), *understood as the assumption that something lies beyond our system of linguistic signs to which a written work can refer to substantiate its claim to be an authentic statement.*³⁸ He supports this by taking Saussure's notion of *difference* to another level. Very simply Derrida says that because every time we learn a new word or even see a familiar word in a new context, next to a different word or even in a new sentence we have never read before, the process of meaning is never complete. This is structuralism and the linguistic matrix on steroids. At least Saussure proposed that each culture used words in the same way. Derrida is saying that because words are nuanced by their context and because there is a near-infinite number of combinations of the words we

³⁸ Grenz, p. 148.

know and even worse, there are words we still do not know, meaning is never achievable. Therefore, the resurrection will mean something different to every single person. We always only have an approximation of meaning. Unpacking the near infinite relations of words is what Derrida is referring to as deconstruction. We naively think that we can ascertain meaning but at best all we can do is keep uncovering layers and layers of relations (matrix!).

This sounds convincing does it not? Skepticism always sounds convincing at first blush. Keep in mind that both structuralism and deconstruction do not tether words to real life experience. There is a simple way to get out from under the layers of relations. I say *Cow*. You ask *What?* I point to a cow and you say *Oh, I understand, "cow."* We have communicated because our words are tethered to real live objects that we are capable of knowing.

Response to Common Criticisms of Common Sense Realism

There are objections raised to the theory of common sense realism but they are amazingly weak. We look at two of them proposed by Wittgenstein as quoted in Thisleton's work on philosophical hermeneutics.³⁹

The first argument goes like this. Advocates of common sense realism point to the fact that children learn the language in a way consistent with common sense realism. To learn the meaning of the word *spoon* the mother points to the shiny metal thing and says *spoon*. If we hold up a piece of paper and say *paper* will the child think that we are referring to the paper, to the color white, to its rectangular shape or what? In this Thisleton thinks that Wittgenstein has undone common sense realism. This is just not true. We do not claim that learning the meaning of words is easy. If the child thinks that *paper* refers to *white* then he is simply wrong. How will he learn his lesson? When he has had more training and sees a whole group of white things, including a piece of paper, and is then told that these things are *white*. If we think that the word *crucifixion* is referring to

³⁹ Thisleton, pp. 123 ff. These are the only two listed. Since Thisleton does not accept common sense realism one assumes these are considered some of the best arguments.

a picnic then we will be confused about the Gospel. Before we can understand the Gospel we need to do the work of learning what the words refer to!

Why is it so easy to overturn these objections? It is because no one has really invested in understanding common sense realism since the days of Kant. It is *passé* and out of style. It is considered to be a straw man that is easily knocked down. The second argument from Thisleton is just as weak.

The second argument is that the referential theory (what we are calling common sense realism) works only for objects, i.e. things like tables and rocks and books. Abstract things like *God* or *love* or *salvation* cannot be learned in such a way. In response to this argument we should recall the first principle of common sense realism from above. All knowledge begins with and is rooted in sense perception. *Salvation* is not some abstract concept over and above sense perception but is very much a sense perception oriented concept. Ask a theologian to differentiate *salvation* from *forgiveness* and the response will be steeped in sense perception. It would go something like this. Forgiveness is the wiping clean of the slate. Salvation means to be saved, like having a life preserver thrown to you when you are drowning. Far from being *abstract* concepts somehow divorced from real world referents, it happens to be the case that these concepts are unthinkable apart from real world experience. The reader is challenged to imagine anything without real world reference! Shall we consider the word *God* and see if we know anything about it apart from real world references? We need look no farther than John's prologue for proof that *God* is understood by real world referents. *In the beginning was the Word and the word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

V. Critique of Dr. Voelz's Use of Post Modern Hermeneutics

In section II above, we summarized how postmodern hermeneutics shows up in Dr. Voelz's book. Having subsequently reviewed the philosophy that led up to

postmodern thought (III), postmodern hermeneutics (IV) and the common sense realist approach to understanding (V) we can now proceed to a critique of postmodernism in Voelz's book from the viewpoint of common sense realism.

Review of Our Basic Concern with Post Modern Hermeneutics

Post modernism claims to be a-metaphysical. Postmodern thinkers and their predecessors come from the post critical (i.e. post Kantian) world of thought in which metaphysics is considered to be off limits. Yet, there is I believe, a postmodern metaphysics. It is the metaphysics of matrices. This matrix metaphysics is quite obvious in the postmodern emphasis on the reader in interpretation. For example, when post modern hermeneuticians speak of the reader being a text in addition to the text that is being read, and that both texts, reader as text and the text itself, must be read over and against each other, one is talking metaphysics. That this is metaphysical becomes clear in the language of horizons that postmoderns like to use. The metaphysics here is that the two texts must interact and intersect each other for their to be understanding. That is not a simple truth of empiricism. That is a claim that can only be under girded by a metaphysics of process or flux that views all being as somehow being relative to all other being. We will describe and analyze this further below.

Our concern is that this metaphysics comes from Hegel/Schliermacher, Heidegger/Bultmann, Gadamer and others and is contradictory to the biblical theology of God creating things distinct from Himself and distinct from other created things. It is also a metaphysics that either ascribes universal Spirit (Hegel) to all souls or requires all souls to provide meaning in this world by themselves (Heidegger and the existentialists) or at the very least denies the possibility of us knowing objective truth. If it allows for any universality at all, it is limited to the linguistic structures that we use.

Concerns with the Author/Text/Reader Triptych

This concern arises right away in Voelz's text with the triptych of author/text/reader, a construct commonly used in post-modern hermeneutics. To review what we outlined above, the point is that to understand a text one must

<u>The Triptych Decoded</u>			
The Triptych	Author	Text	Reader
Post-Modern Understanding	Psychologism (Schliermacher)	Linguistic Semiotics	Existential Possibilities Or Reader as A Second Text

pay attention to each of these three: author, text and reader. As the chart above illustrates, in post modernism this triptych is code language for 1) psychologism, 2) linguistics and 3) existential possibilities – reader as a second text.

1) Psychologism is our designation for the approach of Schliermacher and others who claim that to really understand a text one must get into the author's mind. This can be a harmless exercise for a confessional pastor (i.e. *getting into his head*) but for Schliermacher it is rooted in pagan Hegelian metaphysics which claims that all minds participate in *the Mind* (God) and therefore through rationalistic thought we are able to glean what is true and eternal in what the author expresses, because all minds have access to *the Mind*.

2) Linguistics is a rigorous science and we must be thankful for Dr. Voelz and others who are able to lead us through its mazes of jargon but in the hands of the post modern hermeneutician, linguistics means that truth and meaning are disconnected from reality and are found only synchronically in the matrix of a given sentence, paragraph or literary work. This is unacceptable to us because we believe that meaning is arrived at not only synchronically but also diachronically by studying how rational beings have connected a given word to their real-life sense perceptions (i.e. common sense realism).

3) The third part of the triptych is code for a) **existentialist** hermeneutics and b) the **reader as a second text**. Put simply, the **existentialist** claims that objective reality outside of us is either unknowable by us or is at most a meaningless string of random

things and events that need my will foisted upon them to give them meaning. More optimistic existentialists like Bultmann, believe that what I experience as life and reality is open to possibility. The Scriptures then become documents that open me up to the possibilities of hope and salvation. The story of Christ's resurrection (whether it be factual or not) opens up existential possibilities of faith and confidence as I look to my own future. As outlined above (pp. 5 ff.), the **reader as a second text** is a theory that there are always two texts involved in any reading: the text being read and the text of the reader (i.e. his experiences, knowledge, presuppositions, etc.). In the collision of the two worlds of thought, i.e. the reader and the text, there arises the truth or meaning of the text.

Dr. Voelz agrees with this matrix metaphysics of two texts in one. He states that the reader has a role in interpretation saying that he/she *activates what he sees*.⁴⁰ In common sense realism that role is to discover the meaning of the text. Dr. Voelz and postmoderns mean something far more. What exactly does it mean to activate the text? Texts are not dead. They contain the words that point us to the being of the things they represent. The words *Judy Voelz* (to borrow an example from Dr. Voelz) have the power to call to our minds the concept we have of this real woman. The text activates me. I do not activate the text. As we showed above, it is a misguided idea of existentialism that we activate texts. The existentialist says that all that there is, (usually understood to be what is traditionally referred to as the will) and random experiences. I must foist my being into these random experiences to make sense out of them. The existentialist claims that I activate the world. This is the matrix metaphysics. The world is meaningless, does not even exist until I activate it. The world is my world. Once existentialism meets twentieth century linguistic philosophy, which claims that only language is real or that language is our only entry point into the real, it becomes natural to say that we activate texts.

We believe that we would be better off doing away with the triptych and simply focusing on the text. The concept of the triptych is unnecessary and can only lead to principles of interpretation that are unacceptable. It is unnecessary because both ends are

⁴⁰ Voelz, p. 208.

nothing more than the middle in the triptych. Let me explain. If there is anything we need to know about the author, it will come to us via another text. Let us say that a new Testament exegete makes some amazing claim about the Apostle Paul that could change significantly how we interpret Paul. We would analyze that claim as its own text to see what? We would analyze it to see if it is true or not. If it is true, we then say that we have found truth in another text that helps us with the Biblical text. You see, it is all about texts and studying them to see if they are true or not and what they mean. Unless you accept a Hegelian cosmology in which God has infused himself into all rational minds and therefore there is some great truth to be discovered in the author himself because he is infused with Mind, then there is no reason to connect the author in triptychal form to the text. They are distinct and should remain distinct. The only thing that we are going to learn that is useful about the author will come from other texts (spoken or written) by others or even by the author himself. But these are separate texts. They are not a part of the biblical text I am studying. To inherently connect them to the text I am studying is confusing.

The same can be done with the reader end of the triptych. Let's say that there is a sheep rancher in Wyoming that has some perspective in his own personal horizon (i.e. according to postmoderns, himself as a text) that sheds light on our understanding of the beloved 23rd psalm. The postmodern hermeneutician claims that this impacts the meaning of the text because of his personal horizon. I say the meaning of the text was there all the time. It is just that he has a greater fact base than I do about sheep herding and if he takes the time to tell me about it or write it down so that I can read about it, I will then judge that text either spoken or written to see if it truly is an insight into the text. It is not an insight because he has it. It is an insight because it is a truth about shepherding. It may be that he has a peculiar understanding of shepherding, even a wrong understanding of it and so we will judge his text on shepherding to make sure it is correct. The insight is not automatically true just because he lists his vocation as shepherding on his 1040 form. It is not true because he has experienced it existentially. It is true if it is true. Arriving at the

truth or falsity of an insight is not easy but it ought not to be complicated by the metaphysical mumbo-jumbo of individual horizons. Or to put it negatively, if the reader is interpreting the text from his own horizon and that horizon is getting in the way of the truth of the text, then he needs his horizon adjusted by more texts containing truths that he is not aware of yet.

To offer another example, Dr. Voelz says on p. 341, that interpretation must always consider the text of the interpreter i.e. his view of morals, the world, etc. But the confessional interpreter does not do this. He slowly but surely weeds out of his interpretation his own bias and replaces it with the bias and presuppositions of scripture.

Matrix Metaphysics and the Hermeneutical Circle

We have been calling this emphasis on horizons and relations in post modern hermeneutics a matrix metaphysics. We must be clear that Dr. Voelz does not specifically espouse a matrix metaphysic. For that matter, neither do the prominent practitioners of postmodern hermeneutics. Their goal is actually to escape the subtleties of metaphysics. But what we have seen already and will see again is that an emphasis on relations, particularly the notion of two intersecting texts (i.e. the text itself and the text of the reader's life and experiences) is prominent in postmodern hermeneutics and in Dr. Voelz.

Dr. Voelz accepts the postmodern claim that meaning is relational and contextual. For instance, he says that we do not know what the letters r-a-n stand for unless we see them in the context of a sentence.⁴¹ He also says that no essential meanings of words exist.⁴² He flat out says *meaning is bound to relationships*.⁴³ I know what the letters r-a-n mean because I have had empirical experience with running. Sure there are many different ways running can be used and the context clarifies that but what it is clarifying is which concept of *running* I ought to think on for understanding. To say that there are no essential meanings of words puts any and all communication at risk. Postmoderns are

⁴¹ p. 113.

⁴² Voelz, p. 112.

⁴³ Voelz, p. 99.

wiling to live in a culture where there is no truth and no absolutes but confessional Christians do not accept that low standard. If there is no essential meaning for the word *dog* then I can never use it in a sentence and expect anyone to understand what I mean by it. Imagine how foolish this is. When I say “dog,” if there is no essential meaning for this word then I can never communicate to you that such thing as a dog exists. That means there are no dogs! But the postmodern is alright with this conclusion because in matrix metaphysics the significance of dogs is only insofar as they come into my horizon of being and the dogs that come into that horizon of being, because they are understood by me only within the context of all my other experiences, can never match up to what has come into your horizon of being as a dog and so there is no way we could ever have meaningful communication about dogs. We need common sense to rescue us from this mirage-reality and it does. The fact of the matter is that essence is an attribute of things and we are able to apprehend essence! Essence is not an attribute of words. Words are merely conventions that are attached to essences.

Dr. Voelz gives us an example to illustrate the postmodern notion that words are understood only by context. He uses the example of the three words *John*, *killed* and *Jim*. He argues that we can use these same three words in different order and mean different things. E.g. *John killed Jim* or *Jim killed John*. The same words can mean different things. This is not true. *John* still means the guy I know as John. *Killed* means to take someone’s life and *Jim* means the guy I know as Jim. When I say *killed* after the name *John* I now know that the guy I know as John took someone or something’s life. That is what happens when you connect a verb with a noun. When I add an object such as *Jim*, then I know who or what John killed.

Dr. Voelz gives a further example by noting the countless words and phrases that can be used to identify his wife⁴⁴, e.g. *daughter of Earl Hayes*, *wife of the author of this book*, *Judy Voelz*, etc. This only illustrates that a given object can have different conventional names but they all refer to the same referent and we figure out what that

⁴⁴ Voelz, p. 99.

referent is by continuing to ask questions until we limit it down to a specific Judy Voelz. If I say *Judy Voelz kicked the ball or the wife of James Volez kicked the ball*, I have said the same thing. It means the same thing! I can say it a number of different ways based on the conventions used to describe something.

We do not deny that context helps us to understand what referents we are referring to and the meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or even an entire tome. But what we reject is the adopting of structuralist's philosophy that replaces a correspondence theory of truth with a coherence theory of truth. Dr. Voelz is endorsing a coherence theory of truth in line with Saussure's structuralism.⁴⁵ Voelz summarizes structuralism in five succinct points. We caution against the acceptance of the last three of these principles: *totalities are explained in terms of the relationships among the parts; parts have meaning only within the context of the whole; synchronic, not diachronic analysis is the key* (to meaning). These principles flow out of a modern to postmodern mindset that sees reality not in terms of the subject/object dichotomy but in terms of matrix metaphysics.

Consider the first principle listed above. If totalities are explained in terms of the relationships among the parts then postmodern thinkers are right to conclude that there ultimately is no truth. Dr. Voelz rightly connects this to the hermeneutical circle so popular in twentieth century exegesis,⁴⁶ but as understood by the structuralists and as defined by Voelz, we can never say we have arrived at a truth because there will always be further study and elucidation awaiting us because the whole depends on relationships of the parts. Linguistically the argument goes like this. Each time I use or encounter the word *dog* in communication, its relationship to the other words, paragraphs and books in which it is found helps to elucidate the meaning of the word. Therefore, I can never really say that I understand the word because I can never exhaust the different relationships it might have in my communication and the communications I read. This is not unrelated to the existential version of the matrix used by Gadamer, Hiedegger and Riceour, to list a

⁴⁵ Voelz, p. 103.

⁴⁶ Voelz, p. 103.

few. They say my being is always relative to my current being-in-the-world. I will know everything in the future differently because of the experiences I am currently having now. There is a half-truth here for sure. The whole truth is that I am enriching my being with each successive experience. I have apprehended the being of dogs and have learned that *dog* is the convention used in my native language to identify this form of being. When I encounter a new breed of dog the being of dog has not changed. I have simply enriched my understanding of the concept of dog in my being with a nuance. Being does not change, it is enriched.

How do we get out of the hermeneutical circle? We get out of it via this notion of enrichment. When I first see a dog I have apprehended in my mind the concept of dog. I may not be able to articulate it until someone tells me what the convention is in our language for this concept. Therefore, when I see the word *dog* in a text, I do not need to read the rest of the text to know what it means. I know it already. But, the structuralist responds, what if the text is using it in the perjorative sense of *dog*, i.e. that sure was a dog of a hotel. Now we are in the arena of conventions. The same convention (*dog*) can be used of different things. Will the context help me figure this out? Yes it will but not in the sense of some endless hermeneutical circle of language or being. I will probably have figured out by the end of the sentence that this is referring to a different thing than a canine.

The Hermeneutics of Community and Confessional Standards

This brings to mind Dr. Voelz's postmodern approach to confessions. Voelz uses postmodernism to defend the confessional principle. It is good to see hermeneutical theory pressed into the service of defending a confessional approach to theology, but as we have seen throughout the paper, bringing postmodern hermeneutics into biblical interpretation means bringing along the matrix metaphysics and its faulty subjectivity. Voelz says *It is uncomfortable but necessary to recognize the role of the interpreter in*

*the interpretive process.*⁴⁷ Yes it is uncomfortable but it is not necessary in the way Dr. Voelz presents it. He goes on to say

The Church has always recognized the interpersonal nature of textual interpretation and said that it can only truly be done within the church (“within the church” being understood to include personal faith as well as community context). Thus a **confessional posture**, one which specifically endorses a given community/faith understanding of the historic Christian church which produced and received those documents, **is a completely responsible one after all.**⁴⁸

Two things stand out here. First, Dr. Voelz has to really push the *personal faith* (see his parenthetical note in the above quote) point in order to make sure that the text of the interpreter (the unacceptable subjectivity) is included in the confessional effort. The church includes the faith of individuals but when Luther, Melancthon, Chemnitz, *et al* referred to the church in matters of confessions they were not imagining anything remotely close to Dr. Voelz’s reader as a second text! Secondly, we would argue that confessional theology does not mean returning to the *community/faith understanding of the...church which produced and received those documents*. We are not returning to a community’s belief; we are returning to the truth inspired by the Holy Spirit that is in the scriptures themselves. When speaking of the original communities that produced and received the documents of scripture would Dr. Voelz be including the Galatians or even Peter who was apparently supporting the Galatian heresy to whom Paul must speak anathema? The Galatians are a damning example of the faulty subjectivity involved when we try to involve *faith communities* in the interpretive process. It was not a faith community standing before Emperor Charles V at Worms in 1521. For that matter it wasn’t even an individual. It was the truth of the word of God that Martin Luther stood upon when he called the church back to its scriptural roots.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Voelz, p. 340.

⁴⁸ Voelz p. 340. See also pp. 219 ff. where Dr. Voelz uses the notion of the original community to shed light on the faulty notion of the implied reader in philosophical hermeneutics.

⁴⁹ Luther said unless he was convinced by scripture or by reason he would not recant. Our point here is to emphasize scripture but it is worth our while to consider why he also referenced reason. By reason he meant the God given intellect applied in the interpretive process and the basic intellect that we use each day. He is referring to our common sense ability to know truth. He was not referring to the bankrupt version of postmodern reason that we have summarized in this paper. Luther rejected Aristotilian ethics and metaphysics only as it was applied to the doctrine of justification. He also rejected reason only insofar as

We have grown accustomed to calling the Lutheran Confessions a hermeneutic for the scriptures. This may no be the best approach. A hermeneutic as understood by postmoderns is a semi- closed system of meaning much like a given culture's language is understood by Saussure and other structuralists. A culture's language is seen as a semi-closed system (structure or framework) of relationships in which words find their meaning, thus the term *structuralism*. In this way of thinking truth is a matter of coherence, not correspondence.⁵⁰ In this way of thinking the confessions are a sort of language and our claims to truth must stay within them. While in practice this may work, i.e. guarantee orthodoxy, it is a totally confused way of understanding the confessions. The confessions are not a hermeneutic system of coherence. They contain the truth. They got the truth from the Bible.⁵¹ The Bible is true not because it is a self-consistent book (coherence theory) but because it corresponds to reality. The confessions are true because they reflect the correspondence to reality as found in the scriptures.

All this talk about the reader's role leads Voelz to a discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in interpretation⁵² and again we see the interpolation of philosophical hermeneutics creating problems. Dr. Voelz says the Holy Spirit gives the believer congeniality with the text. This is similar to making the reader into one who accepts the community's reading of the text. Dr. Voelz says that when one's personal text becomes congruent with the personal text of the New Testament, one's personal text includes faith.

it applied to the same. He was not an existential fideist by any stretch of the imagination. He regularly used and applied reason in his scripture studies.

⁵⁰ The correspondence theory of truth, typically associated with common sense realism, holds that I have truth when what I believe corresponds to the fact of the matter in reality. I claim that the statement *That dog is black* is true and if indeed in reality that dog is black then I have the truth. The coherence theory of truth teaches that something is true if it is in keeping with a given system. Applied to language, I would be practicing a true use of the word *dog* if I use it in the same way as the rest of my language speakers.

⁵¹ Notice that it has become popular to refer to the confessions as a faith tradition. This is a genuinely postmodern way of speaking and it all grows out of the dominance of hermeneutics in the last century. This has served the cause of diversity and has been bandied around by many who support the cause of President Benke in the current struggle in the LCMS. The term *faith tradition* is as innocuous as the term *Christ event* that has been put into service even in our denomination. Both of these phrases are one step removed from common sense and it is in this one step that postmodern theorists pack their subjective baggage. Instead of *faith tradition* we should refer to the *holy and true word of God*. Instead of the *Christ event* we should refer to *Christ's death on the cross* or *the life and work of Christ*.

⁵² Voelz pp. 223ff.

This is not the role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's work is not involved with meaning. The Holy Spirit uses the meaning of the scriptures to create heartfelt trust in God putting him above all other things. Satan understands the meaning of the phrase "Jesus died on the cross to pay for the sins of the world." But, he does not believe it. He has congeniality to the text. He understands the Lutheran Confessions, which is why he rails against them. He knows they are the true exposition of the scriptures but he does not put his confidence in the Lord who authored the scriptures that they norm. He rejects the work of the Holy Spirit to that end. The Holy Spirit creates faith. I cannot by my own reason or strength come to my Lord Jesus Christ or believe in him apart from the Holy Spirit but I can understand the word of Scripture apart from Him.

Conclusion

The bottom line is theologians beware. This generation's philosophy is next generation's heresy! Philosophy is dangerous stuff, especially when it is de-linked from our common sense understanding of reality that is so key to what God has done in the incarnation of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, born of Mary!

Confessional theology has certainly profited from the hermeneutical movement of the twentieth century because it has got people focused on texts and words and after all, the true faith is a religion with a text. But the existentialist roots of the hermeneutical movement leave us with a postmodern philosophy that is vacant of real being. Postmodern hermeneuticians believe that language is everything. Language is important but we confess that *o logos sarx egenetou* (the Word became flesh). Consider the following text quoted by Dr. Voelz at the end of his section on the hermeneutical circle.

Life itself, and with it science, occurs in hearing that spoken before us and in responding.

We must, after we have heard – indeed, in hearing itself – assume a position, not conclusively, but rather, in such a manner that, even in our deepest commitments, we remain aware of the ultimately provisional nature of judgment.⁵³

⁵³ p. 104, from Oswald Bayer, *Autorität und Kritik: zu Hermeneutik und Wissenschaftstheorie*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1991, 1

It is disappointing that this quote is given without any critique by Dr. Voelz. It is a disconcerting quote for two reasons. First, in the true form of postmodern skepticism because of the hermeneutical circle, it is posited that all judgment is provisional. This of course means that there is no truth and if there is no truth then we are the most pitied of men. Secondly, a world in which *life...occurs in...in hearing and responding* is the vacuous life of the linguistic existentialists. All there is, is me and my existential awareness of the dread of death. Limiting life, and reality for that matter, to language cuts out the richness of being. The word became flesh. God said at creation *it is good*. Common sense realism supports this affirmation of the physical world by teaching that in knowing we truly apprehend the being of truly existing things, albeit conceptually. Ironically existentialism is poorly named because it focuses on the alienated existence of the self and its need to assert itself into the vacuum of despair known as life. Common sense realism on the other hand teaches that we truly know all of the rich created being around us and are not alienated from it but invited to enjoy this creation which is good.⁵⁴ *This is most certainly true!*

⁵⁴ See Etienne Gilson's book *Being and Some Philosophers* for this critique of existentialism.

Annotated Bibliography

Postmodernism

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The middle section of this text is a very readable introduction to the philosophy of postmodernism. The first section on the culture of postmodernism is helpful while the last section, which is Grenz's attempt to fold postmodern thought into the Christian faith is dangerously prone to relativism.

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This is the classic work consisting of a reconstruction of class notes from Saussure's seminal lectures.

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Biblical Hermeneutics

Becker, Siegbert W. **The Foolishness of God, The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther**, second edition. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing, 1999.

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This is an excellent introductory level text on the different approaches to interpretation in the late modern and postmodern era.

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Philosophical Hermeneutics

Caputo, John D. **Heidegger and Aquinas, An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics.** New York: Fordham University Press, 1982.

Gilson, Etienne. **Being and Some Philosophers**, second edition. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952.

If one wants to understand how being has been understood through the ages this is the text. Gilson is a Thomistic realist. His insights on Plato and the Neoplatonists are very important for the confessional theologian's understanding of early church theology.

Gilson, Etienne. **The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas.** New York: Random House, 1956.

This is the best analysis of Aquinas.

Klocker, Harry R. **Thomism and Modern Thought.** New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1962.

This is an excellent commentary on how the leading philosophies of the twentieth century stack up to common sense realism. It is not parochial at all but gives a very treatment of existentialism, pragmatism, naturalism, etc. highlighting each movement's strengths but in the end showing how their weaknesses lead to common sense realism.

McKeon, Richard, editor. **Introduction to Aristotle.** New York: Random House, 1947.

Owens, Joseph. **An Elementary Christian Metaphysics.** Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1963.

This is the best comprehensive treatment of common sense realism that we have ever seen. It intended to be elementary but is a moderate to difficult book but that is because there is no simplistic way to teach this most important yet this most elusive of subjects.

Thomson, Garrett. **On Aristotle.** Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2000.

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Collins, James. **A History of Modern European Philosophy**. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1954.

This is an indispensable guide to modern philosophy. Collins comes from a line of instructors from the middle of the last century at St. Louis University who emphasized the text. He offers some of the most fair, unbiased and insightful commentary on modern philosophers from Descartes to Bergson.

Descartes, Rene. **The Philosophical Works of Descartes, vol. I**. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1911.

Heidegger, Martin. **Being and Time**. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1962.

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Philosophical Hermeneutics Family Tree

ROMANTIC IDEALISM

Subjective and Objective collapse into the Divine present in history and human minds.

Hegel

Meaning is guaranteed by presence of the Divine in world and all knowers

Marx

Applies Hegelian dialectic to materialism

Schliermacher

Meaning is guaranteed via Hegel's rationalism

EXISTENTIALISM

Rejection of subject/object distinction. The will (subject) determines everything.

Nietzsche

No objective truth or meaning possible; all there is will to power

Heidegger

Meaning is found in the self-willed arena of my being –in-the-world

CRITICAL REALISM

Phenomenon of the objective world are truly knowable.

Kant

Truth is created by categories of the mind

Husserl

PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

Ontological Hermeneutics

Meaning derived from my existential interaction with the text; Gadamer, Bultmann, etc.

Structuralism

Meaning is derived from the context not from author or reader.

Saussure

Linguistics of Synchrony

Deconstruction Nothing left, no subject, no object... Derrida, Foucault, etc.

Ricoeur brings subject object together; the text is metaphorical, giving rise to meaning.

