

RECLAIMING THE CENTER

CONFRONTING
EVANGELICAL ACCOMMODATION
IN POSTMODERN TIMES



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CROSSWAY BOOKS

A DIVISION OF
GOOD NEWS PUBLISHERS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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THE PREMATURE REPORT OF FOUNDATIONALISM'S DEMISE

J. P. Moreland and Garrett DeWeese

ONE UNIFYING THEME OF postconservative theology is the conviction that foundationalist epistemology is passé. We believe that this assessment is wrong and that the rejection of foundationalist epistemology is a serious mistake. In this chapter we will examine the reasons postconservatives give for abandoning foundationalism and will find them wanting. Then we will make a positive case for a modest foundationalism that we believe is clearly superior to the postconservative communitarian/coherentist alternative, showing that, in the important test case of perception, such an account explains how we are able to have knowledge of external reality that is not mediated by social or linguistic conventions.

I. THE “DEMISE” OF FOUNDATIONALISM?

As they assert “the demise of foundationalism,” Stanley Grenz and John Franke observe with irony, “How infirm the foundation.”¹ Rodney Clapp claims that foundationalism has been in “dire straits” for some time, avowing that “few if any careful thinkers actually rely on foundationalist thinking,” even though they cling like addicted smokers to “foundationalist rhetoric.” Says Clapp, evangelicals “should be nonfoundationalists exactly because we are evangelicals.”² Nancey Murphy is concerned to justify a “postmodern” theological method in the face of “a general skeptical reaction

¹ Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 38. Grenz and Franke use the phrase “the demise of foundationalism” ten times in the first fifty-four pages (part 1) of the book.

² Rodney Clapp, “How Firm a Foundation: Can Evangelicals Be Nonfoundationalists?” in *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000), 19-32.

to the demise of foundationalism in epistemology.”³ There is no need to multiply examples. What prompts the postconservative rejection of foundationalist epistemology?

The Postmodern Context

Postconservative theology represents an attempt to learn from postmodern critiques of modernism and to develop a theological method which takes seriously those critiques. The defining motif of postmodernism, in the famous slogan of Jean-François Lyotard, is “incredulity toward metanarrative.”⁴ The result is an aggressive pluralism that refuses to privilege any culture, any canon, any moral code, or any philosophical or theological system. The only intolerable claim in the postmodern ethos is the (modernist) claim to objective truth. But since foundationalist epistemology, allegedly fathered by René Descartes, aims at justifying objective truth claims, it too is intolerable.

Postconservatives seem to have swallowed this line of reasoning, and so seek an epistemology and a corresponding methodology that is anti-foundationalist. Whether the result will be more palatable in the postmodern context remains to be seen. But in our view, the question of the *adequacy* of anti-foundationalist epistemology is more important than its *acceptability*. To understand the reasons offered by postconservatives for rejecting foundationalism, we must begin with an understanding of foundationalism itself.

Foundationalism

A significant aspect of our self-understanding is that we are creatures who believe things. Our beliefs may be categorized as either true or false, and at least some of our true beliefs count as knowledge.

Traditionally—and rightly, we believe—knowledge has been taken as “justified true belief.” For an item to count as knowledge, mere true belief is not enough. Accidentally true beliefs can’t count as knowledge; they must be *justified* or *warranted*.⁵ Justification or warrant, then, is what converts true belief to knowledge.

A *belief* is an intentional mental state whose object is either (i) an object in the external world; or (ii) such an object, a specific proposition, and the

³ Nancey Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion and Ethics* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1997), 131-132.

⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

⁵ While there are technical distinctions between the concepts of justification and warrant, those will not concern us here. For details, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

relation of correspondence between them. In the former case, I may believe a field to be rectangular. The object of the belief is the field itself. I need not see the field *as* a field (for example, I may mistakenly think that it is a lawn) to have such a belief. In the latter case, the mental state is sometimes described as an affirming attitude toward a proposition, for to believe something is just to believe that it is true. My mental state is about the field itself, the proposition *that the field is green*, and it includes the judgment that the proposition succeeds in corresponding to the state of affairs (the grass's being green) in the external world. A belief may be said to be true or false in a derivative sense depending upon the truth or falsity of the propositional content of the belief.

Beliefs typically have *grounds*. To say that a belief is grounded is to say that it depends upon, arises from, or is supported by something else. That something else is, in Paul Moser's terms, an indicator that the belief is true.⁶ Beliefs have positive epistemic status, or are *justified*, if and only if they have the right kind of grounds.

Foundationalism refers to a family of theories about what kinds of grounds constitute justification for belief, all of which theories hold the following theses:

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

Classical foundationalism, of which the Cartesian project is the paradigm example, holds that Condition C is indubitability: the ground of the belief must guarantee the truth of the belief. It is recognized in nearly all quarters that classical foundationalism is too ambitious.⁷ Even granted that there are some indubitable beliefs, there simply aren't enough of them to ground our entire noetic structure. Further, it certainly seems that certain beliefs which

⁶ Paul K. Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 47.

⁷ Two powerful critiques of *classical* foundationalism are Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976).

are not indubitable may legitimately be held as properly basic, for example, beliefs grounded in perception, memory, or testimony. And more: classical foundationalism is motivated largely by the belief that certainty is a necessary condition of knowledge, or that one must know that one knows in order to have knowledge. But these analyses are either too strict or lead to an infinite regress, leading in either case to the skeptic's lair.

The past three decades have witnessed the development of various versions of foundationalism which avoid the criticisms leveled against the classical version. Among contemporary epistemologists, modest foundationalism of some form is the "dominant position."⁸

Modest foundationalism holds that Condition C is something weaker than indubitability: the ground of the belief must be truth-conducive. Thus, in a modest foundationalism, at least some properly basic beliefs are defeasible (subject to being shown to be false by subsequent evidence). Further restrictions on Condition C will mark the difference between different versions of modest foundationalism.

Anti-Foundationalism

Recognition of the failure of classical foundationalism has unfortunately led many thinkers to assume that *no* form of foundationalism can succeed. For some, the dismissal of modest foundationalism along with its classical cousin is motivated by a suspicion that a reasonable account of properly basic belief cannot be given—that is, that Condition C cannot be successfully cashed out. But for others, we suspect, the dismissal is due more to prior theoretical commitments. We will now examine three theoretical commitments that lie behind a number of postconservative rejections of foundationalism. In the next section we will suggest what we believe to be a satisfactory Condition C and show how such a foundationalism works.

The three theoretical commitments that appear in postconservative writings are these: (i) rejection of the correspondence theory of truth in favor of an epistemic or deflationary theory of truth; (ii) rejection of metaphysical realism in favor of a theory of socially or linguistically constructed reality; and (iii) rejection of the referential theory of language in favor of a "semiotic" theory in which linguistic signs refer only to other signs and never to the world as it is. Not every thinker who might accept the "postconservative" label accepts all three of these, to be sure, but these three are so closely linked and

⁸ Michael R. DePaul, "Preface," in *Resurrecting Old-Fashioned Foundationalism*, ed. Michael R. DePaul (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), vii.

appear so frequently that we shall take them as jointly constituting the theoretical ground for postconservative anti-foundationalism.⁹

It turns out on inspection that all three commitments are minority positions in contemporary analytic philosophy, and the arguments to be found in contemporary postconservative writings for these commitments (and there are not many such arguments) are rather uninformed philosophically. We will discuss these three beginning with the third.

Rejection of the Referential Theory of Language. One tradition in philosophy of language, found in Plato's *Cratylus* and in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, holds that words bear some kind of metaphysical link to their referents. This view is rightly rejected. The association of certain words with concepts on the one hand, and real-world referents (particulars that fall under the concepts) on the other, is indeed conventional (with the possible exception of onomatopoeic words).

But acknowledging the conventional nature of language does not, as is apparently assumed by postconservatives, undermine the ability of competent language-speakers to refer to the world. To be sure, post-structuralism and deconstructionism claim that signifiers point only to other signs and never to the world as signified, that language simply does not relate to the world.¹⁰ However, recent philosophy of language has devoted considerable effort to developing sophisticated theories of reference, with impressive results.¹¹ We do not have space here to expand on this; suffice it to say that there is good theoretical grounding for our commonsense belief and everyday experience that human beings are in fact able to refer to the world by means of language.

Rejection of the Correspondence Theory of Truth. According to the correspondence theory, a proposition is true just in case what it represents to be the case is in fact the case. Truth is a property of a proposition, and a proposition is made true by a fact. Something about the way the world is determines the truth of a proposition, so truth is determined by a relation between a

⁹ So Grenz and Franke speak of the dramatic retreat of "Foundationalism, allied as it was with metaphysical realism and the correspondence theory of truth. . . ." And a few pages later they assert, "The simple fact is, we do not inhabit the 'world-in-itself'; instead, we live in a linguistic world of our own making. . . . Human reality is 'socially constructed'" (*Beyond Foundationalism*, 38, 53).

¹⁰ For an exposition and critique of the postmodern view, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning In This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998), 61-65.

¹¹ See, for example, Gareth Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, ed. John McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982); Saul Kripke, "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference," in *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6-27; Michael Devitt and Kim Sterelny, *Language and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 15-86.

proposition and the *world*. The correspondence theory thus is a *realist theory* of truth.

Epistemic theories of truth claim that whether a statement is true depends on whether we have the right kind of reasons for asserting or believing the proposition—whether the proposition is *justified* for us. Thus truth is determined by a relation between a proposition and *us*. (Coherence theories of truth, scientism, and postconservative approaches that make truth relative to what is accepted by a social community are all epistemic theories.)

Deflationary theories deny that truth is a property. Certain deflationary theories claim to give a logical analysis that is purported to show that adding “. . . is true” to a statement (e.g., “The proposition *that grass is green* is true”) does not attribute a real property to the proposition, but merely restates it. Other versions claim that when we say, “That’s true,” of a proposition, we are performing a “speech act”—that is, merely endorsing or consenting or agreeing to an assertion. Thus truth is determined by what we want to *do* with a proposition. (The pragmatic theory of truth turns out to be a deflationary theory, as do those postmodern approaches which identify assertions of truth with attempts to exercise power.)¹²

How should we decide which kind of theory of truth is correct? Several lines of reasoning lead us to reject epistemic and deflationary theories. To begin with, in rejecting deflationary accounts, we note three things. First, the purported logical analyses of sentences containing “. . . is true” do not do what it is claimed they do—they do not analyze the *meaning* of “. . . is true” but only analyze the *use* of the phrase. There is a significant difference, and a theory of truth must first of all give an account of the concept itself, what we *mean* by “is true,” not merely how we *use* the concept. Second, all pragmatically oriented theories falter on the recognition that (i) some truths have no pragmatic use (e.g., “There is no largest prime number”); (ii) some truths are unknowable to us (e.g., it is either true or false that “The number of protons in the universe is even,” but apart from divine revelation that is not something any person can ever know); and what is worse, (iii) some falsehoods have pragmatic value (e.g., “I did not have sexual relations with that woman . . .”). Third, it would come as a great surprise to millions of competent language speakers to learn that when they added “. . . is true” to a proposition, they were merely reasserting the original proposition and not making a further claim about the proposition itself. Such a counterintuitive

¹² For a thorough discussion, see Richard L. Kirkham, *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

result should not be accepted in the absence of compelling arguments, and the absence of such arguments is notable.

This counterintuitive result applies as well to postmodern assertions that claims of truth are merely disguised exercises of power. Now, it might be the case that sometimes, insisting on the truth of a proposition (or an ideology) is in fact an attempt to gain or exercise power. But it does not at all follow that in a frank exchange between persons of goodwill, a spirited claim of "Yes, it's true!" is in any way a disguised power play. If we reflect honestly on the occasions when we ourselves have claimed truth for one or another proposition, the postmodernist claim seems patently false.

We also reject epistemic accounts of truth because they seem to conflate the issues of (i) knowing (or justifiably believing) that a proposition is true, and (ii) a proposition's being true. Justification is a very important issue in epistemology, the subject of a very vigorous debate among professional epistemologists. But why should we think that the concept of truth can be equated to the concept of justification? Indeed, many theories of justification are concerned to show that justification is truth-conducive—that is, if we have the right kind of reasons or evidence for holding a belief, then the belief is likely true. Epistemic theories of truth make the truth of a proposition a matter of our having the right kind of reasons for believing it. But that can't be correct: we often have justified *false* beliefs, beliefs about the world which turn out not to be the case.¹³

Finally, some postconservatives level the following sort of argument against the concept of objective truth. In the words of Philip Kenneson:

To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations. Truth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there.¹⁴

But this is to confuse sentences with propositions. The former are individual utterances or inscriptions in a particular language; the latter are abstract, non-linguistic conceptual structures that exist independently of anyone's thoughts. Propositions may well exist (in God's mind) even if there are no human minds. Further, propositions may be the contents of the thoughts of many dif-

¹³ For a thorough defense of a "minimal correspondence" theory of truth, see William P. Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Philip D. Kenneson, "There's No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing, Too," in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 159.

ferent people at different times. Propositions have the property of being true or false. A sentence is true or false derivatively, depending on the truth-value of the proposition that the sentence instantiates. Since the correspondence theory of truth is formulated in terms of propositions, not sentences, arguments such as Kenneson's are simply irrelevant.

We believe that biblical teaching makes the most sense in light of the correspondence theory of truth.¹⁵ The Old and New Testament terms for truth are, respectively, *'emet* and *alētheia*. The meaning of these terms and, more generally, a biblical conception of truth are broad and multifaceted: fidelity, moral rectitude, being real, being genuine, faithfulness, having veracity, being complete.¹⁶ Two aspects of the biblical conception of truth appear to be primary: faithfulness, and conformity to fact. Arguably, the former presupposes a correspondence theory. Thus, faithfulness may be understood as a person's actions corresponding to the person's assertions or promises, and a similar point could be made about genuineness, moral rectitude, and so forth.

Whether or not this first aspect of a biblical conception of truth presupposes a correspondence theory, there are numerous passages in the second group—conformity to fact—that do. Two interesting classes of texts, with numerous examples of each, fall within this second group. First, there are hundreds of passages that explicitly ascribe truth to propositions (assertions, and so forth) in a correspondence sense. Thus, God says "I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right" (Isa. 45:19). Second, there are numerous passages that explicitly contrast true propositions with falsehoods. Repeatedly, the Old Testament warns against false prophets whose words do not correspond to reality (e.g., Deut. 18:22, "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken"), and the ninth commandment warns against bearing false testimony, that is, testimony that fails to correspond to what actually happened (Ex. 20:16).

Finally, what becomes of a claim such as "Jesus is Lord"? According to Kenneson, it is meaningless to say that such a claim is objectively true:

Truth becomes internal to a web of beliefs; there is no standard of truth independent of a set of beliefs and practices. . . . Under the new paradigm,

¹⁵ See Norman L. Geisler, "The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (October/December 1980): 327-339; Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1980); Douglas R. Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

¹⁶ See R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:52-53; Colin Brown, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), 3:874-902.

this sentence translates into something like “‘Jesus is Lord’ is consistent with the convictions and actions of Christians, but not with those of others.” . . . It simply does not make sense to think of reality as it is in itself, apart from human judgments.¹⁷

We do not believe that this view can be reconciled with the biblical data or with evangelical convictions.

Rejection of Metaphysical Realism. Metaphysical realism is, simply, the view that there is an objective reality that exists irrespective of subjective beliefs or linguistic constructs. Grenz and Franke allow, “There is, of course, a certain undeniable givenness to the universe apart from the human linguistic-constructive tasks. Indeed, the universe predates the appearance of humans on the earth.” But then they immediately go on to say, “To assume that this observation is sufficient to relegate all the talk of social construction to the trash heap, however, is to miss the point. The simple fact is, we do not inhabit the ‘world-in-itself’; instead, we live in a linguistic world of our own making.”¹⁸

It is difficult to know what to make of such claims. Grenz and Franke offer no argument, and one looks in vain for arguments for such claims in other postconservative writers. They seem to regard the claim as self-evident; to assert it is to prove it. But it is far from self-evident. For we can readily acknowledge that we use language to communicate concepts, that many—perhaps even most—concepts are learned by means of language, and that it is difficult to think clearly of something for which we lack an adequate vocabulary. We can even agree that certain facts are linguistically or socially constructed.¹⁹ For example, what counts as a unit of economic exchange in America (a dollar bill) depends on American social conventions. But none of that entails that we do not or cannot apprehend many aspects of the world in itself. And it most certainly does not entail that an objective world does not exist.

Summary

We find it rather disappointing that postconservative writers uniformly reject foundationalism, and generally do so with very little argument. The three the-

¹⁷ Kenneson, “There’s No Such Thing as Objective Truth,” 163-164.

¹⁸ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 53.

¹⁹ For helpful accounts of the phenomenon of social construction that distinguish between what is socially (subjectively) constructed and what is ontologically (objectively) real, see John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995); and Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

oretical commitments that can be discerned in their writings, which might undercut foundationalism, are either themselves highly suspect, or only do so in the case of extreme versions, as straw men that represent no contemporary foundationalists. A modest foundationalism, according to which some foundational beliefs are defeasible, is left untouched.

II. A MODEST FOUNDATIONALISM

Earlier, we characterized grounds of a belief as indicators of the truth of a belief,²⁰ and claimed that the right kind of grounds provides justification for a belief. Thus, the grounds should be understood as epistemic rather than causal or pragmatic. That is, the relevant kind of grounds will relate to the *truth* of beliefs, and not to the *cause* (e.g., hallucinatory drugs or a brain lesion) or the *usefulness* of a belief. What is of interest here is an account of the non-doxastic grounds, or evidence, which provides justification for properly basic beliefs.

Many foundationalists have wanted to say at this point that for evidence to be truth-conducive it must reliably indicate the truth of the proposition for which it is evidence; it is locating the reliability that sets one reliabilist against another. Possibilities include agent reliabilism, process reliabilism, social doxastic process reliabilism, and evidence reliabilism. This is not the place to discuss each version of reliabilism, and since it seems to us that a certain form of evidence reliabilism is the best version, it is that version that we'll develop.

Basic Evidence

Evidence reliabilism claims that a properly basic belief is a belief grounded in a particular kind of basic evidence. Now, not just any kind of evidence may play the role of basic evidence, for although the modest foundationalist is willing to accept some defeasible beliefs as properly basic beliefs, he is not willing to countenance just any sort of belief! A reasonable solution is provided by *modal reliabilism about evidence*—the doctrine that there is a qualified modal tie (viz., necessity) between basic evidence and the truth.²¹ The reliable tie between basic evidence and the truth must be modal and not merely contingent (for example, nomological—governed by natural law—or

²⁰ Moser says that a truth indicator “provides indication for one that a proposition is true in the sense that it makes the proposition *probably true to some extent* for one” (Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence*, 50, emphasis his).

²¹ See, for example, George Bealer, “A Theory of the A Priori,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 81:1 (March 2000): 1-30. The term “modal” stands for “necessary” (necessarily, two is an even number), “contingent” (it is contingent that Jefferson City is the capital of Missouri), or “impossible” (it is impossible that there be square circles).

causal), for that would open the position to such familiar counterexamples as contingently reliable clairvoyance.

We propose a modal characterization of basic evidence as the first approximation of a definition:

If E is a basic source of evidence, then necessarily, for anyone in ideal cognitive conditions, beliefs formed on the basis of E would be mostly true.

Let us call someone in ideal cognitive conditions an ideal cognizer. A basic source of evidence, for example, one's sense of sight, delivers (sensory) evidence to a cognizing subject. We need not imagine this ideal cognizer to be God himself; a person with ideally functioning human cognitive and perceptual equipment would qualify. To the degree that we fail to be ideal cognizers—noetically flawed as we are by the Fall and by the absence of pure epistemic virtues—we will fail to get truth in every case. But as we approach such conditions, and if we restrict ourselves to suitably elementary beliefs grounded in basic evidence, we can approximate the ideal.

This characterization, then, is relativized to ideal cognizers. And it requires only that most, not all, deliverances of *E* be true, thus allowing for the possibility that even for an ideal cognizer a particular deliverance of basic evidence may be false (hence, basic evidence is possibly defeasible). Further, it is a simple conditional, not a biconditional, so it characterizes but does not define what constitutes a basic source of evidence.

But a crucial question needs answering at this point: What explains why a putative basic source has such a modal tie to the truth? Surely one cannot simply define a modal tie into existence! It is in answer to this question that the idea of theory enters. We assume that a particularist (as opposed to a methodist) approach to this question is correct, and that we can reflect theoretically on our own cognizing without thereby becoming guilty of viciously circular reasoning.²² If this is so, then we may examine our own basic (non-doxastically grounded) beliefs and discern their evidential grounds. We may introspect our own cognitive states and assess our own intellectual virtues. We may compare track records of the deliverances of different putative basic sources. We may form hypotheses about the way these sources function in belief formation. We then engage in theorizing about the world, and finally, on the basis of our best comprehensive theory of the way the world is, we are

²² For argument, see John Greco, *Putting Skeptics in Their Place: The Nature of Skeptical Arguments and Their Role in Philosophical Inquiry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

able to explain why certain kinds of evidence are indeed basic sources.²³ And so we arrive at the following (“df” means “by definition”):

E is a basic source of evidence =_{df} (i) necessarily, for anyone in ideal cognitive conditions, beliefs formed on the basis of *E* would be mostly true, and (ii) *E*'s modal reliability is explainable by the best available comprehensive epistemological and metaphysical theory of the world.

We believe this definition can take account of such generally recognized basic sources of evidence as introspection and rational intuition.²⁴ If that is correct, then we have an account of what it is for a source of evidence to be modally reliable, or basic, and of how to extend that account to other candidate basic sources such as perception, memory, and testimony. When applied to perceptual beliefs, our version of modal reliabilism implies that our perceptual experience is the ground for the truth of perceptual beliefs, and our reliabilist account of this is a second-order theory of why this is the case.²⁵ In the next section we will show in more detail how this works in the case of perception, such that perceptual beliefs are properly basic.

Briefly, we want to show how this view of modally reliable evidence meets certain objections commonly lodged against reliabilist theories. First, a common criticism leveled at reliabilism is that it falls prey to the widely discussed “generality problem.” The problem is this: A reliable process, say, seeing a tree in a field, can also be described (more generally) as a process of seeing a tree, or seeing a landscape, or seeing; and (more specifically) as a process of seeing an oak in a pasture, or seeing an oak with new foliage in a cow pasture, or seeing an oak on an early spring morning in Jones’s pasture, and so forth. The challenge is to say just which process is reliable and why. The critic suggests that in the end, the reliabilist cannot simply explain the reliability of *types* of doxastic processes, but will need to explain the reliability of each *token* (a particular example of a type) process. But an evidence reliabilism escapes this criticism, since it is evidence and not a process that is basic. For example, one’s evidence for a perceptual belief *just is* that perception (more on this below); one’s evidence for a memory belief *just is* that memory, and so on.

Second, reliabilism is criticized on the basis of thought experiments that

²³ We would need much more space to argue for the criteria to determine which theory is “best.” Suffice it to say that simplicity is not the sole—nor indeed the most important—criterion. Such theoretical virtues as explanatory power, empirical adequacy, and fecundity are crucial as well.

²⁴ Much of the work on intuition as basic evidence (with some extension to perceptual experience) has been done by Bealer, “Theory of the A Priori.”

²⁵ Thus, although we use the term “reliabilism,” our theory is really a second-order theory. This differs from other forms of reliabilism, which are first-order theories.

supposedly show that reliabilism will either rule out doxastic processes that we know are reliable, or will allow in processes that we know are not reliable.²⁶ But as just noted, modal reliabilism about evidence does not claim that evidence justifies a doxastic process, but rather that it justifies beliefs. Further, the modality involved in the definition of basic evidence is metaphysical necessity, not nomological necessity. But the thought experiments assume at best a nomological possibility. So these criticisms miss the mark.

A final criticism suggests that any particular cognizer might simply fail to form any beliefs on the grounds of reliable evidence.²⁷ But by relativizing the definition of evidential reliabilism to ideal cognizers, we escape this criticism as well.

III. AN ONTOLOGICAL MODEL OF THE KNOWING SUBJECT AND RELEVANT MENTAL STATES

So far, we have laid out what we believe to be the best version of modest foundationalism, one which accepts defeasible basic beliefs in the foundation. On reflection, it seems clear that perceptual beliefs offer an important test case of the foundationalism we propose. The reason is that, if modest foundationalism is correct in accepting defeasible beliefs as properly basic, then perceptual beliefs seem to be the most important candidate class of putatively basic (but defeasible) beliefs. So we need to show how our best comprehensive theory of the world will be able to explain why perceptual experience is in fact basic evidence. If we can do so, we will have shown that we have every right to take our perceptual beliefs as basic (subject to certain restrictions), and we will have shown that our access to the world is not, after all, mediated by or subsequent to our linguistic structures, or our linguistic community, or our conceptual framework, or, indeed, by anything external to our minds. In this section, then, we shall unpack an ontological model of epistemically relevant mental states and the knowing subject. The model will show that perceptual experience is indeed modally reliable, and will explain that modal reliability in terms of a comprehensive theory of perception and the knowing subject. We do not offer such a comprehensive theory here, but we provide some crucial aspects of such a theory relevant to the nature of the knowing subject and the ontology of acts of perception.

It is often the case that postconservative pronouncements fail to have accompanying arguments for them, and we do not know of a single case in

²⁶ This sort of argument is made by Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence*, 202-203.

²⁷ This argument is made by Greco, *Putting Sceptics in Their Place*, 178.

which a postmodernist or postconservative has developed a model of the mind according to which assertions such as “all perception is theory-laden and takes place from within a standpoint (conceptual scheme, language game, social web)” is given any clarity whatever so that the reader can make sense of how this is supposed to take place. For example, Grenz claims:

At stake in the new outlook, therefore, is a more profound [*caveat emptor*: note the rhetorical work this word does as a substitute for argument] understanding of epistemology. Recent thinking has helped us see that the process of knowing, and to some extent even the process of experiencing the world, can occur only within a conceptual framework, a framework mediated by the social community in which we participate.²⁸

Such assertions have degenerated into un-illuminating mantras, and in those rare cases in which they do conjure up a picture of what they assert, the picture that comes to mind is of sad little perceptions saddled with the task of carrying theories on their backs! We hope to provide a remedy to this dialectical gap in what follows.

The Idea Theory and a Postmodern Model

Postmodernism is not unfairly characterized as a linguisticized version of Bertrand Russell’s (foundationalist!) neutral monism, the postmodern version of which takes language (the group’s linguistic behavior, etc.) as basic, and views both “reality” and “the self” as linguistic constructions. But a more charitable way to describe postmodernism, and one apt for our purposes, is to see it as a linguisticized, quasi-Kantian version of Descartes’s Idea Theory of perception.

To understand the Idea Theory, and the postmodern adaptation of it, a good place to start is with a commonsense, critical-realist view of perception. According to critical realism, when a subject is looking at a red object such as an apple, the red object itself is the direct object of the sensory state. What one sees directly is the apple itself. True, one must have a sensation of red to apprehend the apple, but on the critical-realist view, the sensation of red is to be understood as a case of being-appeared-to-redly and analyzed as a self-presenting property. What is a self-presenting property? If some property F is self-presenting, then it is in virtue of F that a relevant external object is

²⁸ Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty-first Century* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 73-74. Indeed, if Grenz’s claim about the role of community mediation is accepted, it’s hard to understand how epistemology can help us see anything. There will only be “seeing as” or “seeing that,” but no “simple seeing.” But more on these points later.

presented directly to a person, and F presents itself directly to the person as well. Thus, F presents its object directly, though by being grounded in F, and F presents itself directly and in an ungrounded way.²⁹

This is not as hard to understand as it first may appear. Sensations, such as being-appeared-to-redly, are an important class of self-presenting properties. If Jones is having a sensation of red while looking at an apple, then having the property of being-appeared-to-redly as part of his consciousness modifies his substantial self. When Jones has this sensation, it is a tool that presents the red apple directly to him in virtue of having the sensation, and the sensation also presents itself to Jones directly and ungrounded in anything else. What does it mean to say that the sensation presents the apple to him directly by grounding that presentation? Simply this: it is *in virtue of* the sensation that Jones sees the apple. The *in virtue of* locution is primitive and unanalyzable. It is not efficient causality, as the following examples illustrate: The proposition "Grass is green" is true *in virtue of* grass being green. Grass is green *in virtue of* instantiating the property of being green. The earth exists now *in virtue of* God's sustaining power.³⁰ In both cases—the truth of "Grass is green" and the current existence of the earth—there is a metaphysical ground for the relevant feature. Similarly, Jones's direct awareness of the apple's redness is grounded in the sensation—being-appeared-to-redly—that he has.

Moreover, by having the sensation of red, Jones is directly aware of both the apple and his own awareness of the apple. For the direct realist, the sensation of red may indeed be a tool or ground that Jones uses to become aware of the apple, but he is thereby directly aware of the apple, with nothing mediating that awareness. His awareness of the apple is direct in that nothing stands between Jones and the apple, not even his sensation of the apple. That sensation presents the apple directly; though as a tool, Jones must have the sensation as a necessary condition for seeing the apple.

According to Descartes's Idea Theory, one's ideas (in this case, sensations) stand between the subject and the object of perception. Jones is directly aware of his own sensation of the apple and indirectly aware of the apple in the sense that it is what causes the sensation to happen. On the Idea Theory, a perceiving subject is trapped behind his own sensations and cannot get outside them to the external world in order to compare his sensations to their objects

²⁹ See J. P. Moreland, "The Knowledge Argument Revisited," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 43 (June 2003): 219-228.

³⁰ For an excellent discussion of *in virtue of* and related ontological distinctions, see William F. Vallicella, *A Paradigm Theory of Existence: Onto-Theology Vindicated* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002).

in order to see if those sensations are accurate. On this view, the mind may be likened to a bucket. Thoughts, sensations, and other mental states are “in” the mind as something is in a container, e.g., as apples are in a bucket. The *self* or *I* is, in a somewhat unclear way, trapped behind one’s mental states and must experience the world *through*, that is, *mediated by*, one’s ideas.

The postmodern and postconservative twist on the Idea Theory replaces Descartes’s ideas with language. Language is like glasses that mediate objects, and objects are perceived indirectly by way of one’s language (standpoint, social context, thoughts, conceptual structures).

In a certain sense, postmodernists and their postconservative adapters believe that people are trapped behind something in the attempt to get to the external world. However, for them, the wall between people and reality is not composed of sensations, as it was for Descartes; rather, it is constituted by our linguistic practices. Our language serves as a sort of distorting and, indeed, creative filter. We cannot get outside our language to see if our talk about the world is the way the world is. In fact, it may be superfluous even to talk about an external world. Many postmodernists claim that the “external world” is just a construction. On this view, intentionality—a mental state’s “ofness,” “aboutness,” or “directedness” toward an object (even if the object does not exist, e.g., a fear of Zeus)—actually causes something to happen *to the object*. Intentionality causes the object to have some of its properties or parts. So, for example, by looking at an apple, the mind creates the apple’s color, but the apple itself is colorless when not being perceived. Or, more extremely, it creates the object whole cloth. In fact, the “self” itself is, for some postmodernists, a construction of language. There is no unified, substantial ego. The “self” is a bundle of social roles, such as being a wife, a mother, a graduate student, an insurance salesperson; and these roles are created by the linguistic practices associated with them. For many postmodernists, then, consciousness and the “self” are social, not individual.

For those who have taken the postmodern turn, there is no “simple seeing.” All seeing is “seeing as” or “seeing that” and, thus, an act of perception turns out to be a mental *judgment* of some sort. All perception, they claim, is theory-laden, experienced *from within* or *behind* a standpoint of some sort. To get clear on this, we need to distinguish two kinds of knowledge.

1. *Knowledge by acquaintance.* This happens when we are directly aware of something; for example, when I see an apple directly before me, I know it by acquaintance. One does not need a concept of an apple or knowledge of how to use the word “apple” in English to have knowledge by acquaintance of an apple. A baby can see an apple—and so have knowledge

by acquaintance of it—without having the relevant concept or linguistic skills. This form of knowledge includes “simple seeing,” and is denied by postmodernists. We will postpone our critique of the denial of simple seeing and, in fact, will defend its reality by presenting and arguing for our model below.

2. *Knowledge by judgment.* This breaks down into mere conceptual knowledge and propositional knowledge. The former includes “seeing as,” i.e., seeing an object *as* falling under or satisfying a concept. Examples include seeing an apple as being red or as being Joe’s favorite fruit. This form of knowledge requires the subject already to have acquired the relevant concept. Usually, postmodernists reduce concepts to language and language to linguistic behavior; so to see something as F requires one first to have learned certain linguistic practices, and in this way, knowledge by acquaintance is reduced to judgmental knowledge, and this is further reduced to know-how. (How one does this without seeing social linguistic practices as being something or other is not clear. Zeno’s regresses lurk near!) Propositional knowledge is knowledge that an entire proposition is true (or satisfies a postmodern surrogate for truth, e.g., is accepted by one’s community). For example, knowledge that “the object there is an apple” requires having a concept of an apple and knowing that the object under consideration satisfies the concept.

A postmodernist does not take an act of seeing to be directly about an object (e.g., an apple). Instead, he takes it to be about one’s own concept of or word for the object that stands between the subject and whatever is “out there” (if anything is). In this way a postmodernist reduces propositional attitudes such that they turn out to be about the contents of consciousness (and this is often further reduced to behavioral know-how regarding the relevant linguistic item, e.g., the word “apple”), and not about the external world. A propositional attitude involves a mental “attitude”—a state of thinking, fearing, hoping, wondering, believing—and a mental content—that P, e.g., that the apple is red. For the postmodernist, a propositional attitude such as “thinking that P” (that the apple is red) is a mental attitude of thinking directed toward a mentally internal object, viz., a proposition (more likely, toward a sentence in English, or “mentalese,” a supposedly unique mental language in the brain), which is internal to the subject. “Thinking that P” is to have the attitude of thinking directed toward the proposition “that P.” This is solipsism with a vengeance, Kantianism gone mad. By contrast, those of us who are direct realists would take “thinking that P” to be a mental attitude of thinking directed immediately toward the external state of affairs P (the apple’s being red) in virtue of the subject having the proposition “that P” (the thought that the apple is red) in his mind.

Further, for the postmodernist there is no such thing as thinking without language, and, in fact, thinking is simply linguistic behavior in which one correctly uses words according to the linguistic practices of one's social group. But for two reasons, this just seems to be wrong. First, if a person cannot think temporally and epistemically prior to acquiring language, then one would never be able to *learn* language in the first place or be able to find an entry point into a language game as a first-person subject. Children *must* think temporally and epistemically prior to learning their community's language.

Second, language is neither necessary nor sufficient for thinking. It is not necessary, for the reason just given. Nor is it sufficient. One can have linguistic perceptions (sounds, sensory experiences of scribbles) without having any associated thought, for example, when one perceives a language one has not learned. Moreover, a linguistic sign (for example, the "internal" sound or visual sensation "the President") can occur to one in an idle sensory experience with no associated meaning at all, or with a potentially infinite set of meanings the subject assigns to it (the President of the United States, of the PTA, of the American League . . .). In all these cases, having a chunk of language is not sufficient for having the relevant thought.

Finally, postmodernists reject the idea that there are universal, transcultural standards, such as the laws of logic or principles of inductive inference, for determining whether a belief is true or false, rational or irrational, good or bad. Consequently, there is no predefined rationality. Postmodernists also reject the notion that rationality is objective on the grounds that no one approaches life in a totally objective way, without bias. Thus, objectivity is impossible, and observations, beliefs, and entire narratives are theory-laden. There is no neutral standpoint from which to approach the world, and thus observations, beliefs, and so forth are perspectival constructions that reflect the viewpoint implicit in one's own web of beliefs. Regarding knowledge, postmodernists believe that there is no point of view from which one can define knowledge itself without begging the question in favor of one's own view. "Knowledge" is a construction of one's social, linguistic structures, not a justified, truthful representation of reality by one's mental states. For example, knowledge amounts to what is deemed to be *appropriate* according to the professional certification practices of various professional associations. As such, knowledge is a construction that expresses the social, linguistic structures of those associations, nothing more, nothing less.

There is great confusion in the postmodern rejection of objective rationality on the grounds that no one achieves it because everyone is biased in

some way or another. As a first step toward a response to this claim, we need to draw a distinction between psychological and rational objectivity. Psychological objectivity is the absence of bias, a lack of commitment either way on a topic, while rational objectivity is the ability to distinguish between good and bad reasons for a belief, and to hold beliefs for good reasons.

Do people ever have psychological objectivity? Yes, they do, typically in areas in which they have no interest or about which they have not thought deeply. Note carefully two things about psychological objectivity. For one thing, it is not necessarily a virtue. Psychological objectivity is virtuous if one has not thought deeply about an issue and has no convictions regarding it. But as one develops thoughtful, intelligent convictions about a topic, it would be wrong to remain “unbiased,” that is, uncommitted regarding it. Otherwise, what role would study and evidence play in the development of one’s approach to life? Should one remain “unbiased” that cancer is a disease, that rape is wrong, that the New Testament was written in the first century, or that there is design in the universe, if one has discovered good reasons for each belief? No, of course one should not—and it is doubtful that one can—when in possession of evidence for or against the proposition in question.

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

To understand this, we need to be clear on the notion of rational objectivity. One has rational objectivity just in case one can discern the difference between genuinely good and genuinely bad reasons for a belief, and one holds to the belief for genuinely good reasons. The important thing here is that bias does not eliminate a person’s ability to assess the reasons for something. Bias may make it more difficult, but it doesn’t make it impossible. If bias made rational objectivity impossible, then no teacher—atheist, Christian, or whatever—could responsibly teach any view the teacher believed on any subject! Nor could the teacher teach opposing viewpoints, because he would be biased against them! In fact, if incompetence is understood in terms of presenting a subject matter in a biased fashion, then the greater one’s knowledge and beliefs about a subject area, the more incompetent one would be to teach it!

A Direct-Realist, Foundationalist Model

In our description and critique of a postmodernist model, we have already presented certain features of our foundationalist, direct-realist model.³¹ Above we argued that “simple seeing” is real and is temporally and epistemically prior to having thoughts, beliefs, concepts, or language. We make a distinction between a sensation and a belief (thought, etc.). A sensation is a non-propositional/conceptual experience possessed by an experiencing subject. If a person has a red sensation, then the person is appeared to in a red-type way. The person has a certain sensory property within his consciousness, namely, being-an-appearing-of-red. Sensations do not contain beliefs or, put somewhat differently, “simple seeing” does not require “seeing as” or “seeing that.” If one sees a red apple, then one has a sensation-of-red, i.e., one is appeared to in a red-type way. If one sees the object *as* red, then one possesses the concept *being red*, and applies it to the object of perception. This concept grounds the subject’s ability to learn how to use the word “red.” Finally, if one sees *that* this is a red apple, then one accepts the proposition that (and, thus, has the perceptual belief that) this object is a red apple. In order to have a sensory experience of something, one need not have concepts or propositions in one’s mind. By contrast, a belief includes the acceptance of a proposition and is the way something seems to a subject when he thinks about the belief in question. According to a traditional view, sensations are not propositional, beliefs are.

We have been talking about sensations, but it is important to note at this point that being-a-sensation-of is a species of the genus being-an-awareness-of. For our purposes, sensations are types of awarenesses that (contingently in embodied persons) involve the five senses, but other forms of direct awareness would be rational awarenesses of abstract objects and their relations (propositions and the laws of logic, numbers and the laws of mathematics, or other universals and their relations; for example, that necessarily, something cannot be red and green all over at the same time), direct awareness of one’s own self, and one’s mental contents in introspective awareness (awareness of spiritual or aesthetic or moral objects).³²

The questions that need to be addressed are: What are sensations, concepts, and propositions, and in what sense are they in the mind? And what is

³¹ For a closely related treatment of these issues, see Dallas Willard, “How Concepts Relate the Mind to Its Objects: The ‘God’s Eye View’ Vindicated?” *Philosophia Christi* 2:1:2 (1999): 5-20.

³² For a statement and defense of properties as universals, see J. P. Moreland, *Universals* (Chesham, Buckinghamshire, England: Acumen; Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

the ontology of an act of perception such that light is shed on a direct-realist theory of perception?

Two topics must be discussed before we answer these questions, because each topic provides needed materials for developing and justifying our model.

First, there are two aspects of knowledge of which any model of the mind must give an account:³³ (i) transcendence toward an object (a mental state such as seeing or thinking is directly about its object, e.g., one is directly seeing the apple or thinking about London); and (ii) community of mental states (we may all have the same sensation, belief, or thought in our minds—e.g., the sensation of redness, the thought that London is beautiful—though each one of us will have our own “having of the mental state”: I have my own individual thinking of London, you have yours; we each have the same thought “that London is beautiful,” but we each have our own thinking that thought). Put differently, mental states like sensations or thoughts are universals—there are kinds of mental states (pain-type sensations, a kind of thought that amounts to thinking that London is beautiful)—and several people can have a particular instantiation of the universal at once (several people can be in the same pain-type state at the same time).

Second, we need to be clear on five metaphysical notions: *substance*, *property*, *exemplification*, *event/mode*.³⁴ Our exposition of these will be brief and only take into account what is necessary for present purposes. A *substance*, such as an individual human person or a dog, is a particular that has properties, that is not possessed by something more basic than it, and that can gain a new property and lose an old one and remain the very same substance. A *property*, such as being red, is a universal that can be exemplified by or present in several things at the same time; e.g., several apples can all have the very same redness in them at once. *Exemplification* is a relation (nexus) that is primitive and unanalyzable. When a substance like an apple has a property like being red, the apple exemplifies redness. Exemplification is a non-spatial relation in virtue of which a property is “in” a particular, but the “in” is not a spatial, container “in.” Redness is not “in” an apple by being

³³ See Dallas Willard, “Wholes, Parts, and the Objectivity of Knowledge,” in *Parts and Moments: Studies in Logic and Formal Ontology*, ed. Barry Smith (Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 1982), 379-400; cf. Dallas Willard, “Knowledge,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, ed. Barry Smith and David Woodruff Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 138-167; J. P. Moreland, “Naturalism, Nominalism, and Husserlian Moments,” *The Modern Schoolman* 79 (January/March 2002): 199-216.

³⁴ For a readable treatment of these and other relevant philosophical distinctions, see Garry DeWeese and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophical Tools for Christians* (tentative title) (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming, 2005); cf. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003). Ordinarily, the term “event” is used in talking about specific mental states. And while it is strictly true that all temporal modes are events but not conversely, we shall use the two interchangeably. We do so because we believe that such mental events are, in fact, best analyzed as modes of the self in a realist version of intentionality.

spatially contained inside the apple or by being spatially present at the same place as the apple. The redness is “in” the apple in that redness enters the being of the apple; the apple has redness “in” it in that the apple exemplifies redness and redness enters the very being of the apple.

A sufficient condition for being an event is a substance having, gaining, or losing a property at or through a given time. The apple’s being red or changing from green to red on Tuesday is an event. When a substance undergoes the event of having a property, that event is a *mode* of the substance. A substance’s having a property at a time is a mode of the substance. It is modified by the property and the mode is a particular, dependent part of the substance. The particular mode cannot exist without the substance existing, though the substance could exist without the mode. A temporal mode is a state of affairs, namely, a substance’s having a property at a given time. For example, when an apple comes to have the color red, or a chunk of clay comes to have the shape of being round, then the apple or the clay is modified by having redness or roundness, respectively. The having of redness by the apple is a mode of the apple. The particular apple’s having redness is not repeatable. It is a particular exemplification of redness by this particular apple. The apple could exist without being red, but this particular instance of redness could not exist in some other apple. Redness could exist in another apple, but that would constitute a different instance of redness, a different mode in a different apple.

With these two topics in mind, what are sensations, concepts, and propositions, and how are they in the mind? Sensations, concepts, and propositions are mental universals that have intentionality and that may be exemplified by several minds at the same time. A sensation of seeing red is the mental property being-an-appearing-of-red; the relevant concept is the property being-a-concept-of-red. A proposition is a structural property that constitutes the meaning of a sentence and that in the relevant case has a structure that mirrors the subject, copula, and predicate of an indicative sentence. The proposition *that the apple is red* is the property that-the-apple-is-red. Just as the property being-water is a structural property built out of the properties being-hydrogen and being-oxygen, among other things, so the property that-the-apple-is-red includes, among other things, the property of being-a-concept-of-red.

How are sensations, concepts, and propositions in the mind? Sensations, concepts, and so forth are “in” the mind the way properties are exemplified by substances. When a mind changes from having the sensation of being red to entertaining the thought that snow is white, that mind first exemplifies the

sensory property being-a-sensation-of-red, and, second, the propositional property that-snow-is-white. Thoughts are in the mind in the same way that properties are in substances; namely, minds exemplify thoughts. Individual mental events, a particular sensation or thought, are modes. As modes, they involve the having of the relevant mental property by a subject. The community of thought is akin to the fact that the unity of the class of red apples obtains in virtue of each exemplifying the same property, redness. Each apple has its own mode, its own having-of-redness, but the redness of one apple is identical to that of another. Similarly, each mind has its own event/mode of sensing red, but the sensation being-an-appearing-of-red is a universal exemplified by, embedded “in,” each sensory event in each mind so modified.

According to this model, thoughts or sensations are not spatially contained inside the mind or in some other way between the subject and the object like a set of glasses. And the model has a way of capturing the truth in the notion that perception is theory-laden without having to embrace this view as it is normally understood, and thereby cutting the subject off from cognitive access to the external world. Concepts, thoughts, conceptual schemes, and so forth are not glasses *through and behind which* the subject is cut off from reality and which, indeed, constitute in Kant's sense their own phenomenological object. No, concepts, thoughts, and conceptual schemes serve as a sort of swiveled neck brace that directs the subject's attention but does not cut off the object from the subject by standing between them. Many of the perceptual “puzzles,” like the infamous duck/rabbit, are precisely cases where either the concept of-being-a-duck or of-being-a-rabbit direct one's perceptual orientation such that certain things are noticed and others disregarded, certain things are brought to the perceptual foreground and others relegated to the background, while the diagram itself is the direct object of the various sensory states directed upon it. In this way, concepts, thoughts, and conceptual schemes may influence perception, but they do not determine what one sees nor are they necessary conditions for seeing in the first place.

So much for a broad-brush presentation of our foundationalist, direct-realist model of the self and its various epistemic states. A major argument for this view is the presentation of paradigm cases of knowledge and perception—sensory or otherwise—that the reader can recognize as being a regular part of his own experience of objects and of himself as a knowing subject. These cases form what is called the phenomenological argument.

The phenomenological argument focuses on a careful description and presentation of specific cases to see what can be learned from them about truth. As an example, consider the case of Joe and Frank. While in his office,

Joe receives a call from the university bookstore that a specific book he had ordered—say, Richard Swinburne’s *The Evolution of the Soul*—has arrived and is waiting for him. At this point, a new mental state occurs in Joe’s mind—the thought that Swinburne’s *The Evolution of the Soul* is in the bookstore. Now Joe, being aware of the content of the thought, becomes aware of two things closely related to it: the nature of the thought’s intentional object (Swinburne’s book being in the bookstore) and certain verification steps that would help him to determine the truth of the thought. For example, he knows that it would be irrelevant for verifying the thought to go swimming in the Pacific Ocean. Rather, he knows that he must take a series of steps that will bring him to enter a specific building (the university bookstore) and to look in certain places for Swinburne’s book. So Joe starts out for the bookstore, all the while being guided by the proposition *that Swinburne’s The Evolution of the Soul is in the bookstore*.

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

The example just cited presents a case of experiencing truth in which the relevant intentional object is a sense perceptible one, a specific book being in the bookstore. But this need not be the case. A student, upon being taught *modus ponens* (the logical form “If P, then Q; P; therefore, Q”; for example, “If it is raining outside, then it is wet; it is raining; therefore, it is wet”), can bring this thought to a direct awareness of specific cases of logical inferences and “see” or be directly aware of those cases and of the truth of *modus ponens* itself. Similarly, a person can form the thought that he is practicing denial regarding his anger toward his father, and through introspection he can be directly aware of his anger and directly see whether or not this thought corresponds with his own internal mental states.

In each case, the relevant thought directs the subject’s subsequent intuitive noticings,³⁵ but in no way cuts the subject off from a direct awareness of the relevant entities. In each case, *there is linguistically and conceptually*

³⁵ What is subsequent is a series of a certain sort of mental act, “intuitive noticings” in which the subject searches for further evidence.

*independent access to the external world—the real world—and not a Kantian phenomenological construction.*³⁶

And just here we can see the modal tie between the evidence of perception and truth. In general, it is possible to be aware of the modal status of a relation between two objects. For example, if one attends to a situation in which Plato is taller than Socrates, one may see that the *taller-than* relation between them is not necessary to the existence of either (e.g., Plato and Socrates could exist and still be themselves even if Socrates were taller than Plato). By contrast, the relation *brighter-than* between the colors yellow and red is a necessary link between them (yellow and red are necessarily such that yellow is brighter than red).

Similarly, through introspection, a person can be directly aware of the correspondence of a perceptual belief to its intentional object, and then one may also be able to be aware of the modal nature of the connection between perceptual evidence and truth. That is, given certain forms of perceptual evidence, a proposition appropriately grounded in that evidence cannot fail to be true. In perceptual situations in which a perceiver is having a hallucination or an illusion of some sort (“seeing” a red apple when no apple exists; seeing a red apple as a yellow grapefruit), our view implies that there must be some difference, however slight it may be, between the perceptual evidence in these problematic cases and the comparable evidence in veridical (accurate, truthful) cases.

Of course, we are not able in every case to compare a perceptual belief with its intentional object, due, perhaps, to cognitive or environmental conditions that fail to be ideal (e.g., if Joe forgot his glasses and can’t quite make out the title of the book on the rack, but thinks it is *probably* Swinburne’s, or if he misremembered the title and thought he was looking for *The Soul of Evolution*). But as we approach the state of an ideal cognizer, it is clear that the tie between perceptual beliefs and the world will be necessary.

IV. BIBLICAL INERRANCY

Finally, we want to show that the notion of modal reliabilism about evidence comports with biblical inerrancy. If we can show that the foundationalist model we have proposed easily accommodates the doctrine of inerrancy, then evangelicals who hold to inerrancy will have an additional reason to favor our model.

³⁶ For a technical, precise, and powerful critique of postmodernism along the lines we have adopted, see R. Scott Smith, *Virtue Ethics and Moral Knowledge: Philosophy of Language After MacIntyre and Hauerwas* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003). For Smith’s analysis of postconservatives specifically, see his chapter in the present volume.

Our claim is that inerrancy as a property of the Bible makes the Bible a basic source of evidence. So beliefs formed on the basis of reading the Bible are properly basic in a way that is isomorphic or parallel to the way beliefs formed on the basis of seeing a red apple are basic.

To see how the argument goes, consider again the case of visual perception. As we have described the process, we form beliefs directly upon the perceptual evidence of seeing ordinary physical objects; we don't infer their presence or properties from other beliefs about, say, a sense-datum (and certainly not upon beliefs about how our linguistic community uses words!). As discussed in the previous section, it is easy to explain how human visual perception is indeed modally reliable (with certain familiar restrictions), and that is because our best comprehensive theory explains how the experience of seeing actual objects in the world serves as basic evidence and so grounds properly beliefs about what one is seeing.

Now, in the case of the Bible, the argument is isomorphic or parallel. We form beliefs directly upon reading the Bible. In at least some instances, we don't infer those beliefs from other beliefs (although often, especially when engaging in the particular discipline of exegesis, that is what we do). For example, let's say we read in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." We may simply find ourselves believing "God loves me," or "God has demonstrated his love for me," or "Christ died for me," without having inferred those beliefs from anything else. So it seems that Scripture is indeed serving as evidence, and that it does so for very many people. Now, we could be mistaken in the things we find ourselves believing; an ideal cognizer might believe something different. But as we apply the techniques of exegesis, as we gain theological understanding, as we acquire the moral and intellectual virtues, we approach at least marginally closer to the ideal.

Further, our best comprehensive theory includes evidence for belief in the existence of a certain kind of God, and for the belief that this God would have communicated with us. And within our best comprehensive theory of the world is embedded the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, based on a priori theological arguments that God's communication to us would be completely truthful.³⁷ So biblical inerrancy explains why the Bible is a basic source of evidence.

It is worth calling attention to the fact that in our argument for the proper

³⁷ The existence of a priori arguments for biblical inerrancy does not preclude the existence of broadly inductive arguments for inerrancy that provide defeaters for alleged inductive evidence against inerrancy and that provide additional positive grounds for biblical inerrancy. See J. P. Moreland, "The Rationality of Belief in Inerrancy," *Trinity Journal* NS 7 (Spring 1986): 75-86.

basicity of beliefs based on the modal reliability of visual perception, even though the experience of visual perception played a crucial role in establishing the proper basicity of visual perception, the premise that visual perception is modally reliable did not itself figure in the argument, so the argument is not circular. Similarly, although beliefs formed on the evidential basis of reading the Bible play a role in the argument for the proper basicity of the Bible, the premise that the Bible is inerrant did not figure in the argument, so this argument is not circular either. That is, we are not asserting that the Bible is inerrant simply because it says it is. And since beliefs grounded in basic evidence are justified, the property of inerrancy, which explains why the Bible can be basic evidence, is that which renders Scripture *on its own* sufficient to justify belief.

V. CONCLUSION

We have examined and found wanting the postconservative anti-foundationalist epistemology. We have made an argument to the effect that modest foundationalism is the correct general theory of justification in epistemology, and modal reliabilism about evidence is the best form of modest foundationalism. We have offered in some detail a model of the knowing subject that explains why perception is indeed a basic source of evidence. And finally, we have offered a summary of an argument to the conclusion that inerrancy is the property of the Bible which makes it a basic source of evidence, and have shown that such an argument comports well with the overall structure of the foundationalism we propose.

If we are correct about all this, then it seems that those postconservative theologians and philosophers who reject foundationalism will be rejecting as well an effective way to incorporate the doctrine of biblical inerrancy into their theologizing, and will need to do a lot of work to justify why their theological claims should be taken as meaningful for anyone outside the Christian community.