Herman Bavinck and Thomas Reid on Perception and Knowing God

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Abstract

Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that Kant had erected an epistemological boundary between mental representations and external reality that precipitates an anxiety in modern theologians about whether one can properly refer to God. As a way past this boundary, Wolterstorff's Reformed epistemology retrieves Thomas Reid's account of perception as an alternative to Kant, according to which knowledge of external objects is direct and immediate. Further, Wolterstorff points to the Dutch neo-Calvinist Herman Bavinck as one who bears many "reidian" elements in his epistemology, especially in the way in which Bavinck argues that the epistemic accessibility of the external world ought to be taken for granted. The thesis of this present paper, however, is that a closer investigation of Bavinck's account of perception reveals that he, unlike Reid, accepts the gap between mental representations and external objects, such that representations are those through which we know the world. Bavinck affirms that a correspondence between the two can be obtained by an appeal to the resources found in Christian revelation. In effect, what emerges in a close comparison of Bavinck and Reid is that Bavinck's account is an alternative theological response to the kantian boundary—one according to which mental representations correspond with external objects because both participate in an organically connected cosmos shaped by a Triune God.

HTR 111:1 (2018) 115–134

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816017000414 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Introduction

Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that Kant erected an epistemological boundary between mental representations and external reality that precipitates an anxiety in modern theologians about whether one can properly refer to God.[1] Indeed, theologians have often felt the pressure of this boundary, drawing one to account for how theological work can continue to enjoy epistemic success. In an attempt either to recover or construct a theology that presupposes the legitimacy of Kant's influence, theologians have tracked various routes. Bruce McCormack's post-metaphysical interpretation of Barth argues that Barth's dialectical theology is critically realistic precisely in the sense that it assumes "the validity of Kant's epistemology" and the "success of Kant's critique of metaphysics," centered upon classical realism's supposed failure to attend seriously to "the role played by the human knower in constructing the 'objects' of knowledge."[2] Sameer Yadav, drawing upon the epistemology of John McDowell's *Mind and World*, recently suggests that theologians ought to disentangle the problem of whether one can perceive God from the general philosophical problem of perception altogether in order to retrieve an appropriately theological naïve realism, arguing that the question of whether reality is susceptible to mental assimilation is a pseudoproblem dependent upon the disenchantment that modern philosophy introduces.[3] Alvin Plantinga's influential *Warranted Christian Belief* argues that a re-examination of Kant's work itself would reveal some fatal flaws, freeing theologians from the anxiety altogether about the success of theistic predication.[4] Further, Martin Westerholm's recent article picks up on Wolterstorff's observation and argues that Kant's work and influence should not be seen as "facts of nature with which we must cope, but rather contingent artifacts that are bound to their context in such a way that it amounts, ironically, to a fall into heteronomy as normative for our own."[5] Theological work after Kant, therefore, continues to wrestle with the implications of Kant's thought no less than the ongoing philosophical work that tries to elucidate further the implications of Kant's influence or to recover some account of direct epistemological realism.[6] Most recently, Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus offer a retrieval and reworking

[1] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Is it Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover from Kant?" *Modern Theology* 14 (1998) 1–18. See also his "How Philosophical Theology Became Possible within the Analytic Tradition of Philosophy," in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (ed. Oliver Crisp and Michael Rea; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 156–68.

[2] Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 130.

[3] Sameer Yadav, *The Problem of Perception and the Experience of God: Toward a Theological Empiricism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015). Cf. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[4] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 1–30.

[5] Martin Westerholm, "Kant's Critique and Contemporary Theological Inquiry," *Modern Theology* 31 (2015) 403–27, at 405.

[6] For an example of the former, see Henry Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004) and A. D. Smith, *The Problem of Perception* (Cambridge,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816017000414 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of realism precisely in order to counter the "dualist theory of representation" they encounter in the narrative of modern epistemology that began with Descartes.[7]

Since the 1998 article, Wolterstorff himself offers his own strategy for recovering from the theological skepticism that Kant introduced. More specifically, Wolterstorff's Reformed epistemology retrieves Thomas Reid's account of perception as an alternative to Kant, according to which knowledge of external objects is direct and immediate. Further, Wolterstorff points to the Dutch neo-Calvinist Herman Bavinck as one who bears many "reidian" elements in his epistemology, especially in the way in which Bavinck argues that the epistemic accessibility of the external world can be taken for granted.[8] The thesis of this present paper, however, is that a closer investigation of Bavinck's account of perception reveals that he, unlike Reid, accepts the gap between mental representations and external objects; representations are those through which one knows external objects. Comparing the accounts of perception offered by Bavinck and Reid will also illumine some of the differences in the way they understand how one knows God. Thus, a fruit of this essay is to demonstrate that, though Bavinck's epistemology may have reidian connotations, especially in his view of the nature of warrant, his analysis of correspondence and the accessibility of the external world resists identification with Reid's, and thus that his response is another potentially fecund alternative to the so-called problem of the gap. When one also considers how Plantinga and Wolterstorff both enlist Bavinck and Reid as forerunners to their own Reformed epistemology (a project at least in part conceived as an attempt to recover from Kant), it seems generative to understand Bavinck's account of perception.[9]

To attend to the theological epistemology of Herman Bavinck here may bring further considerable historical-theological contributions. Herman Bavinck self-

MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), for the latter. See also Terry Pinkard's *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[7] Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus, *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015) 10. To be sure, the account of realism by Taylor and Dreyfus differs significantly from Reid's or, say, Yadav's, as Taylor and Dreyfus draw from Heidegger and 18th century Romanticism. See also Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[8] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Herman Bavinck—Proto Reformed Epistemologist," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010) 133–46.

[9] Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991) 16–93; Wolterstorff, "Herman Bavinck—Proto Reformed Epistemologist." John Bolt acknowledges this connection in an editorial footnote in Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 1: *Prolegomena* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004) 590 n. 73. Hereafter, *RD*. In a recent monograph that attempts to connect Barth with Plantinga, Kevin Diller continues to echo that Plantinga's "critical realism" draws from Bavinck and Kuyper (*Theology's Epistemological Dilemma: How Karl Barth and Alvin Plantinga Provide a Unified Response* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014] 108–109). For a rather different emphasis on Barth's theological epistemology, see Martin Westerholm, *The Ordering of the Christian Mind: Karl Barth and Theological Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816017000414 Published online by Cambridge University Press

consciously writes in a way that engaged his modern context from a Reformed perspective; in the foreword to the first edition (1895) of his dogmatics, he writes that dogmatic theology must be "rooted in the past but labors for the future" and as such "this work," he writes, "is eager to carry the imprint of its own time."[10] In a later work on worldview, he continues his project by including a chapter on epistemology, the burden of which is to discuss the breakdown of "the harmony of subject and object [and of] knowing and being" that resulted from the vicious cycle between rationalism and empiricism, reconsidering also how this harmony may be restored.[11] With the English translations of Bavinck's four volume *Reformed Dogmatics* completed in 2008, studies on Bavinck within the Anglophone world continue to increase significantly.[12] Some interpreters have recently posited that Bavinck's contribution in the area of epistemology is precisely in his critical (and decidedly post-kantian) articulation of realism. However, such observations are made without a more substantial analysis of the texts in which Bavinck is most clear about the matter.[13] With a growing interest in the diversity of the Reformed tradition prior to the modern context and the considerable attention Bavinck is currently receiving, this paper continues these discussions as it probes into the ways in which Bavinck was a constructive theologian representative of the Dutch neo-Calvinist and Reformed tradition working within modernity.[14]

[10] Herman Bavinck, "Foreword to the First Edition (Volume 1) of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*," *CTJ* (trans. John Bolt; 2010) 9–10, at 10. George Harinck comments that Bavinck "was part and parcel of Modern culture and contributed to its character and direction," in "The Religious Character of Modernism and the Modern Character of Religion: A Case Study of Herman Bavinck's Engagement with Modern Culture," *SBET* 29 (2011) 61–76, at 62.

[11] Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, (Kampen: Kok, 1929) 16. Dutch original: "In beide gevallen [empiricism and rationalism] en naar beide richtingen wordt de harmonie van subject en object van kennen en zijn verbroken." Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own.

[12] The literature that explores Bavinck's constructive theology and epistemology in English continues to grow from numerous avenues in the last decade. See, for example, Cornelis van der Kooi, "The Appeal to the Inner Testimony of the Spirit, Especially in H. Bavinck," *JRT* 2 (2008) 103–12; Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology & the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics* (Leiden: Brill, 2012) 19–64; James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Toward a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif,* (London: T&T Clark, 2012); Wolter Huttinga, "'Marie Antoinette' or Mystical Depth?: Herman Bavinck on Theology as Queen of the Sciences," in *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution* (ed. James Eglinton and George Harinck; London: Bloomsbury, 2014) 143–54; Donald Macleod, "Bavinck's *Prolegomena*: Fresh Light on Amsterdam, Old Princeton, and Cornelius Van Til," *WTJ* 68 (2006) 261–82; K. Scott Oliphint, "Bavinck's Realism, The Logos Principle, and *Sola Scriptura*," *WTJ* 72 (2010) 359–90. Bruce Pass, "Herman Bavinck and the Problem of New Wine in Old Wineskins," *IJST* 17 (2015) 1–18; James Eglinton, "*Vox Theologiae*: Boldness and Humility in Public Theological Speech," *IJPT* 9 (2015) 5–28; Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck on the Image of God and Original Sin," *IJST* 18 (2016) 174–90.

[13] Henk van den Belt suggests that Bavinck's epistemology is "between naïve realism and the transcendental idealism of Kant" (*The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* [Leiden: Brill, 2008] 267). See also Van der Kooi, "Inner Testimony," 107–108.

[14] Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (4 vols; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003);

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816017000414 Published online by Cambridge University Press

To these ends, the paper proceeds in three steps. First, I explicate the modern problem as interpreted by Bavinck and Reid—namely, that modern epistemology, except for a few exceptions, posits a seemingly unbridgeable gap between the mental image as perceived by the human mind and the external object (an object that is thought to have first caused a mental image of that object to become present in the mind). Second, I expound upon Reid's response to this problem while following closely Wolterstorff's interpretation and appropriation of Reid. Once Reid's response is in place, I exposit the response of Herman Bavinck. In short, I argue that Bavinck affirms the gap between the external object and the mental image of that object which the mind perceives, but seeks to establish a link between the gap by an appeal to divine revelation and an organic ontology.[15] Reid, however, sought to eliminate the gap by denying that knowledge is mediated by mental images—for Reid, the mind is aware not of a mental representation, but of the external object itself. Finally, I close with some comments on the way in which Bavinck and Reid's respective responses affect their understanding of the knowledge of God.

Before I begin my analysis, one must acknowledge the contextual differences between the two thinkers. Bavinck was a systematic theologian who wrote theology, and only addressed epistemological issues when they seemed pertinent to the theological task. His interlocutors were mostly theologians, and he was particularly interested in the theological issues of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thomas Reid (1710–1796) came almost two centuries prior as a philosopher and as one who addressed primarily philosophical issues. The answers he offered and

idem, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1986); idem, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); idem, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); idem, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012); Willem J. Van Asselt, Theo J. Pleitzer, Pieter L. Rouwendal, and Maarteen Wisse, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011); Herman Selderhuis (ed.), *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark; Carlisle, PA: Paternoster Press, 1999); David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625–1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Antonius Driessen* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

While some have suggested that Bavinck's epistemology is a retrieval of Thomism within a 19–20th century context (see, for example, David Sytsma, "Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology: the Argument and Sources of his *Principia* of Science," in *Five Studies in the Thought of Herman Bavinck: A Creator of Modern Dutch Theology* [ed. John Bolt; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011] 1–56), others observe that Bavinck was much more willing to modify his epistemology with the tools provided by modern philosophy, notwithstanding Bavinck's own criticisms of Thomas, in some important respects. See, in this regard, Henk van den Belt, "Religion as Revelation: The Development of Herman Bavinck's View from a Reformed Orthodox to a Neo-Calvinist Approach," *TBR* 4 (2013) 9–31.

[15] As it will become clearer below, for Bavinck the Triune God is the being in which unity-and-diversity is archetypally exemplified, such that God's creation, too, will bear an analogical shape. The cosmos, therefore, is composed of parts that are integrally related to one another as a single organism.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816017000414 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the problems he sought to resolve were distinctly philosophical problems and rarely, if ever, did he engage in explicitly theological discourse. Further, Bavinck was not an analytic theologian—he wrote prior to the rise of analytic philosophy and did not think or write in terms of the logic set out by contemporary analytic methodology. Nicholas Wolterstorff's retrieval, refinement, and application of Reid's epistemology, by contrast, stand squarely in the analytic tradition. This makes a comparative analysis among the thinkers somewhat tricky. However, given the explicit use of both Bavinck and Reid in Wolterstorff, and the overlap of concerns between Bavinck and Reid, an analysis is still both possible and desirable, given that one acknowledges these caveats.

The Problem of the Gap

For Reid, since Descartes, philosophers have wrongly created a dual-object view of the thing known. The philosophers were commendable insofar as they sought to give an account of the belief that the common man or woman takes for granted, namely, "that the object which they distinctly perceive certainly exists."[16] The analysis that the philosophers offer, however, goes wrong when they assume principles that are ungrounded.

Two of these principles include the belief (1) that a thing cannot produce a cause where it is not present and (2) that an immediate cause of apprehension must be identical with the immediate object apprehended; these principles lead one to deduce that the immediate object one perceives when one interacts with the external world is not a physical object but a mental idea immediately in one's mind. This mental image, in turn, is that which mediates indirectly the external object that first caused that image to be perceived in the mind. This creates a gap between the object that the mind perceives and the thing outside of the mind. It is, in Wolterstorff's analysis, the "belief that physical objects are too distinct for us to have an immediate apprehension of them; our knowledge of them has to be mediated by mental representations."[17]

So, for Reid, philosophers have "split objects into two, where others [the unlearned and the vulgar] can only find one."[18] The cleave between mental ideas and external objects seems to imply either skepticism at best or solipsism at worst,

[16] Thomas Reid, "Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man" in *The Works of Thomas Reid, D. D.: Now Fully Collected, With Selections from His Unpublished Letters* (ed. William Hamilton; Edinburgh: Machlachlan, Stewart and Co., 1846) 215–510, at 369. The narrative that follows here is a familiar one; Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus recently present another rendition of this narrative in their *Retrieving Realism*, 1–26.

[17] Nicholas Wolterstoff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 44. Wolterstorff uses the 1858 edition of Hamilton's collected works of Thomas Reid. Ryan Nichols's *Thomas Reid's Theory of Perception* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007) also offers an account of Reid's epistemology largely consistent with Wolterstorff's, but a focus of this essay is Wolterstorff's retrieval of Reid.

[18] Reid, "Intellectual Powers of Man," 369.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816017000414 Published online by Cambridge University Press

especially when it may involve claims according to which the external world is only accessible by an inference from or an examination of mental ideas.[19] The advocates of the theory of mediation may offer some arguments that ideas can offer a clear access to reality, but their arguments fail to command Reid's agreement.[20] Reid is convinced that the denial of immediate access to reality entails the veracity of Hume's and Berkeley's conclusions, effectively rendering the existence of the external world as a philosophical hypothesis rather than a "dictate of our perceptive powers."[21]

In Wolterstorff's judgment, Kant's epistemological construction would have been equally vulnerable to Reid's critiques because it still falls into the same species of Locke's phenomenalism.[22] The only difference between them is that, in Locke, there is an "ontological duality of types of entities (subjective states vs. external objects and qualities)," while, in Kant, there is a "duality of ways in which the intuitional given is conceptualized as, and presented to, a person (as subjective states of self vs. as objective entities)."[23] Both espouse an account of knowledge whereby the external world (or Kant's thing-in-itself) is only knowable by some mediated subjective state, whether it be an idea (Locke), or the product of an intuition processed by the categories of the ego (Kant). Both epistemologies put into question, in Wolterstorff's analysis, the accessibility of the external world.

It was this move that created the "boundary" between the phenomenal and the noumenal—a boundary that creates significant implications for thinkers since Kant, among which is an anxiety in modern theologians about whether one can meaningfully speak about God. Experience limits knowledge and the intuitions given in experience must be processed by the active receptivity of the categories in the mind. As such, "[k]nowledge of the transcendent, Kant has been saying, is unavailable to us, since the bounds of the intuitional employment of the categories define the bounds of human knowledge, and those bounds coincide with the bounds of time."[24] How can the theologian then refer to God when, on kantian grounds, one can never truly gain knowledge of God?

Herman Bavinck's articulation of the perceived problem is almost identical with Reid's. In the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck expresses his dissatisfaction with Plato, Descartes, Leibniz and Rosmini, because by the positing of innate ideas they raise an "untenable dualism between subject and object."[25] He traces a distinction between a mental representation of a thing and the thing itself to the medieval scholastics,

[19] Ibid., 299.

[20] Ibid., 300.

[21] Ibid., 299.

[22] Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid*, 103. Wolterstorff dubs what I call here the theory of mediation "the way of Ideas." Reid, of course, had not yet read Kant, as Kant was his contemporary.

[23] Ibid., 90.

[24] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Is it Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover from Kant?" 12.

[25] Bavinck, *RD,* 1:224. Bavinck follows Voetius and the Reformed scholastics in their objections against modern epistemology here.

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but argues that modern philosophy perpetuates "an ever-growing gap between a thing and its representation."[26] He pinpoints the problem in this way: "The error underlying this theory seems to be that the actual object of our perception is said to be, not the thing outside of us, but some impression or neural vibration within us."[27] Bavinck observes that, after Kant, many often construe God's revelation as a mere religious postulation that has no basis in objective reality. Bavinck unequivocally rejects this move as untenable "kantianism" and insists that God can be known because of his ongoing act of revelation in nature.[28]

It was Albrecht Ritschl, in Bavinck's mind, who was the theologian that incorporated Kant's epistemology into a whole theological system.[29] At the root of Ritschl's theology is the epistemological distinction between "things as they are in themselves, outside of any relation to our observation, from things as they are for us."[30] Bavinck considered this error the engine driving Ritschl's constructive efforts leading to Ritschl's affirmation that theology is merely a set of value judgments and the accompanying belief that one cannot gain knowledge of God as he is in himself, but only as he is for us. "Not only is revelation here robbed of its specific character and in Christianity restricted to Jesus, but Ritschl's epistemology also pushes him to reduce its content."[31]

It is clear, then, that for Bavinck and Reid (and Wolterstorff), Kant's epistemology has (largely) negative implications for the task of theology. Let us now consider their responses.

Reid's Proposal

Reid's response to the above epistemological conundrum is multi-faceted, but for our purposes can be boiled down to two major moves.[32] The first is to deny that perception involves external reality causally acting upon something in the knower. For Reid, causation is tied to volition; and nature, having no volition, lacks causal powers. This polemic is set against Locke's view, according to which perception involves the causation of ideas in the knower by external objects.[33] So,

[26] Ibid., 227–28.

[27] Ibid., 228. See also pages 216–20. Hegel and Schleiermacher, who rose above the epistemology prevalent in their day are the ones who finally reconnected "subject and object," in Bavinck's judgment, in ibid., 521.

[28] Bavinck, *RD*, 1:340. Bavinck's historical analysis is consistent with James Brown, *Subject and Object in Modern Theology: The Croall Lectures Given in the University of Edinburgh 1953* (London: SCM Press, 1953) 19–20, 168.

[29] Herman Bavinck, "The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl," *TBR* 3 (trans. John Bolt; 2012) 123–63.

[30] Ibid., 128.

[31] Ibid., 158.

[32] Among them, of course, is Reid's contention that the results of adopting the theory of mediated knowledge runs against the cherished deliverances of Common Sense.

[33] For an elaborate analysis of Reid on this, see Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid*, 61–74. One has in view here objectual apprehension, but Reid, it seems, would also affirm direct propositional apprehension.

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Reid takes the philosophers of his day as thinking "that the object perceived acts upon the mind in some way similar to that in which one body acts upon another, by making an impression upon it."[34] This, however, "contradicts the commonsense of mankind."[35] Reid wants to account for perception differently; rather than arguing that in perception the mind is passive, Reid affirms that perception is essentially an act of the subject, an exercise of some original faculty of the make-up of humanity. In perceiving objects, we apprehend what they are by an act of the intellect.

This act of perception, then, produces a different picture altogether. In Reid's account, when one perceives an object, one does not perceive it by way of a mediate idea or mental image that was caused by the object. Rather, one perceives the object itself—an immediate and direct perception. In perception, one apprehends the object and attains an "irresistible conviction" that it exists.[36] For Reid, the claim that a direct perception of the object is what commands our knowledge of and response to the external world is merely a recognition of what the learned and the vulgar alike already take for granted. The claim may not be susceptible to further philosophical dissection, but it is the only claim that does justice to the commonsense of humanity. In the final analysis, Reid appeals to the creative design of God who "intended that we should have such knowledge of the material objects that surround us, as is necessary in order to our supplying the wants of nature . . . and he has admirably fitted our powers of perception to this purpose."[37]

Reid's account is, of course, more nuanced than the brief sketch that I have presented here. He believes that, in perception, one does process the object through the natural pathways of one's biological constitution, and Reid leaves open whether perception should be conceived in terms of presentation or conceptual apprehension. What is clear is that in Reid's account perception involves "*direct*, *immediate* apprehension."[38] Instead of trying to establish the existence of the external world (or, as for Wolterstorff, whether theological predication bears referential success) by working around the theory that knowledge is mediated by mental representations, Reid gets rid of mediation altogether, and that is the key insight that Reid offers as a solution to the problem of the gap. This is not to say that apprehension of the external world does not make use of concepts. Concepts are necessary to apprehend reality but are not mere mental impositions on raw data; rather they just are instantiated by the external object.

Wolterstorff puts Reid's insight into good use as a response to Kant's boundary.

> If we understand perception of an object as awareness of the object—*rather than as awareness of mental representation caused by the object*—then it will not make sense to follow Kant in the further step he takes of thinking

[34] Reid, "Intellectual Powers of Man," 254.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 258–59.

[37] Ibid., 260.

[38] Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid*, 98 [italics in original].

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> of concepts as rules for structuring the objects of our awareness. *For now the objects of our awareness are not mental states but eagles and dogs*. And eagles and dogs are already structured; they don't await structuring by us.[39]

Hence, in this line of reasoning, concepts work as follows:

> How do concepts work on this alternative picture? To perceive an eagle under the concept of eagle is to perceive it to be what it is. Concepts are not barriers between mind and reality but links. . . . If that is so, then properties are at one and the same time entities that we grasp and entities that external objects possess. They are the links.[40]

First, instead of seeking to bridge the gap erected between subject and object, Reid (and Wolterstorff) erased the gap altogether by way of direct apprehension. There is no "space," or boundary, "between being acquainted with something under some concept and having a belief about that entity; to be acquainted with something under some concept just is for one's acquaintance to evoke a *de re* / predicative belief about that entity."[41] Second, in Reid's account an appeal to divine activity is ultimately necessary for an initial creational make-up of the human being as one is equipped with the necessary apparatus for reliable perception. Let us turn now to Bavinck.

Bavinck's Proposal

At first glance, Bavinck's proposed solution seems identical to Reid's. Recall that Bavinck thinks the root problem is the discontinuity between a mental representation and the thing external to the knower. Bavinck argues that, in perception, one gets a "faithful" interpretation of the external world.[42] Even more strongly, Bavinck faults Ritschl for limiting knowledge to perception without including the external world, for in Bavinck's view Ritschl should have seen that "the predicate brings us to the subject; perceptions draw us to essences."[43] Essences of things are given in one's perception, and thus Bavinck could even claim that "the object of perception *is not any phenomenon within myself but the thing outside myself*."[44] In perception, one is immediately convinced of the existence and objectivity of the external world.

Upon closer inspection, however, Bavinck arrives at this conclusion in a quite non-reidian way. In Bavinck's desire to reject a boundary provided by the epistemological gap, Bavinck admits, first of all, that some gap must be acknowledged. Bavinck acknowledges some truth in epistemological realism,

[39] Wolterstorff, "Is it Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover from Kant?," 17 [italics added].

[40] Ibid., 18.

[41] Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid*, 159 [italics in original]. This is a straightforward account of direct realism.

[42] Bavinck, *RD*, 1:229.

[43] Bavinck, "Albrecht Ritschl," 131.

[44] Bavinck, *RD*, 1:228 [italics added].

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816017000414 Published online by Cambridge University Press

according to which the mind can know the mind-independent things external to the knower—but how, exactly, does the mind access external reality? Bavinck says this: "Realism . . . holds fast to the existence of the world because that world is, in an *ideal* sense, *given* in the *representation* itself."[45] It is clear here what he is not denying: "It does not deny *the distinction* that exists between the representation and the thing but at the same time maintains the inseparable connection between the two because it takes the representation as it presents itself."[46] There is a distinction between the ideal representation and the thing in itself, but there is communication of the thing in the representation.[47] Again, this time acknowledging Thomas and the medieval scholastics:

> So on the one hand there is an essential difference between the thing and its representation, because the thing exists outside of us, has real existence there, while the second exists in us and *merely has ideal existence*. On the other hand, there is complete correspondence: the representation is an image, a faithful ideal reproduction of the object outside of us.[48]

Bavinck accepts a gap, but it is a fixed gap, a gap between a mental idea, and the thing that it represents. It is here that Bavinck criticizes modern philosophy for creating an "ever growing gap" between the image and the external object.[49] Why, exactly, does Bavinck affirm the existence of this gap?

A few pages before the above statements, Bavinck discusses his rejection of empiricism. Here we may find some clues. The problem with empiricism, Bavinck thinks, is that it conceives of the mind as passive, a mere recipient of impressions

[45] Ibid., 223–24 [italics added].

[46] Ibid., 224 [italics added].

[47] In this way Bavinck's analysis of knowledge differs from one articulation of Hegel's, in which one "cannot begin from the assumption that the determinations or categories of thought and reality are conceivably distinct from one another, or that they might conceivably 'correspond' to one another. It cannot begin with any conceivable distinction between thought and being at all" (Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History* [2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2005] 45). However, it is congenial with another articulation, in which Hegel regards subject and object as distinct but as a pair in relation. For this view, see Nicholas Adams, *The Eclipse of Grace: Divine and Human Action in Hegel* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, 2013). Despite some of the overlapping epistemological concerns, Bavinck self-consciously distanced himself from Hegel's ontology. On this, see James Eglinton, "To Be or to Become—That is the Question: Locating the Actualistic in Bavinck's Ontology," in *Revelation and Common Grace* (ed. John Bowlin; vol. 2 of *The Kuyper Center Review*; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) 104–24.

[48] Bavinck, *RD*, 1:227. Cf. Sytsma, "Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology," 29.

[49] Ibid. Again, compare this with one interpretation of Hegel's attempt to connect subject and object: "Hegel's objection is not primarily to Kant's ontology—an ontology in which there are phenomena and noumena, or appearances and things in themselves . . . Hegel's primary objection is to the logic which guides the account—a logic in which phenomena and noumena are opposed, where appearances and things in themselves are utterly separate" (Adams, *The Eclipse of Grace*, 22–23). There is, of course, an important difference of emphasis. Hegel responds to Kant by offering an alternate account of logic—a logic of distinctions in inseparable relation (thereby vindicating the connection and essential difference between two poles)—whereas Bavinck appeals to a Triune ontology to connect the two poles, as one shall see.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816017000414 Published online by Cambridge University Press

caused by external objects. This cannot be the case, however, for it "is firmly established, first of all, that in its intellectual activity the human mind is never totally passive or even receptive but also always more or less active."[50] Reid, too, would have conceded that point; Reid conceives of perception as an act of the intellect, in which the mind apprehends reality. But Bavinck's sense is thicker. For Bavinck, the mind not only judges, connects or compares perceptions—it adds to them. Here, Bavinck explicitly agrees with Kant, who "rightly says" that experience can give us what is, but not what it could not be: one cannot experience universal and necessary truths.[51] For Bavinck, "After all, we possess not only particular and incidental truths but also universal and necessary truths . . . which empiricists have tried in vain to deduce from experience."[52] These universal truths are *a priori* starting points for all argumentation—presupposed as the basis for understanding.

The word translated as "representations" in the above quote is the Dutch word *voorstellingen*; further investigation of how Bavinck uses this word in *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing* shows the post-kantian connotations of Bavinck's use. Bavinck investigates epistemology in the first chapter of this booklet, in which he charges the exponents of idealism for failing to produce a proper process of reasoning: it seeks to establish the existence of the outside world by way of an inference from the circle of one's representations (*voorstellingen*): "out of one representation [the idealist] can merely infer another, but [he] can never by reasoning bridge the distance between thinking and being."[53] Though idealism is right in arguing that the object can only be known by representations, one does not infer the existence of the outside world from representations. Rather, in one's "sensations and representations a trustworthy knowledge of the objective reality" is given.[54] In "sensation and representation" lie the maxims of truth and science.[55] The external world is not established by an inference from representations, but representations are that through which we know the external world.

In the *Philosophy of Revelation*, Bavinck reiterates this point. There, he admits that the "truth of idealism" is found precisely in their affirmation that the "sensation and representation [*voorstelling*]" in the human mind is "the basis and principle of all knowledge."[56] It is the mistake of "naïve naturalism" to believe that one receives

[50] Bavinck, *RD*, 1:220.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid. For Reid one does not need to account for how the belief in causality or necessary truths originate. One merely finds oneself believing these truths (presumably because of how human beings are hard-wired), and one is perfectly justified in believing so.

[53] Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, 18. Dutch original: "uit de eene voorstelling kan hij slechts tot een andere besluiten, maar nooit overbrugt eene redeneering de klove tusschen het denken en het zijn."

[54] Ibid., 20. Dutch original "dat wij in de gewaarwordingen en voorstellingen eene betrouwbare kennis van de objectieve werkelijkheid bezitten."

[55] Ibid. Dutch original: "Dit nu is het feit, dat aan alle gewaarwording en voorstelling ten grondslag ligt. Wie het ontkent, ondermijnt alle waarheid en wetenschap."

[56] Herman Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909) 56;

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"a directly given reality," for this position "loses sight of the influence exerted by the subject in every perception of an object."[57]

So, there is an essentially constructive activity by the mind on the thing it perceives—the mind does not merely apprehend objects. Nor does Bavinck appeal to the wiring of humanity to believe simply in universal and necessary truths, as Reid does. Bavinck elaborates on this further as he discusses the role of faith for theological construction. There, he argues that the subjective starting point is a necessary one. Among one of the reasons why Bavinck thinks this is the case is his belief that this is the necessary starting point for other disciplines as well: "Certainly the subjective starting point is not peculiar to theology. All that is objective can be approached only from the vantage point of the subject: the "thing in itself" is unknowable and does not exist for us . . . All life and all knowledge is based on a kind of agreement between subject and object."[58] The subjective consciousness is the key means by which one attends to the world: "All that is objective exists for us only by means of subjective consciousness; without consciousness the whole world is dead for us."[59]

It is tempting to take a wooden interpretation of what Bavinck says here and infer that he is denying that the world continues to exist when human consciousness is no longer extant. That would render Bavinck into a subjective idealist of a higher order, making existence dependent upon human consciousness. Rather, one must note that he links the claim that the thing in itself "does not exist for us" with the epistemic claim that it is "unknowable". All that exists, he says, is accessed only by means of subjective consciousness. Despite the provocative choice of words, the sense of Bavinck's claim is epistemological rather than metaphysical. His sense is that the subject has no epistemological access to the thing in itself, no access to reality that is not mediated or affected in some way by the subjective consciousness. There is no direct access and thus one must not conceive of knowledge of external objects as if one can know them "in itself"—to do so would be to succumb to what Bavinck calls a "naïve naturalism" that fails to take into account the activity of the subject in the knowing event.[60]

Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring (Kok: Kampen, 1908) 46. It is perhaps significant that Bavinck considered these lectures as a further elaboration upon the themes found in *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*. See *Philosophy of Revelation*, 320 n. 21.

[57] Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 56.

[58] Bavinck, *RD*, 1:586. This definition of knowledge as agreement of subject and object, and how to account for that agreement is the focus of modern epistemology. Cf. James Brown, *Subject and Object in Modern Theology*, 20–24. Bavinck elsewhere defines truth this way: "Truth is agreement between thought and reality and thus expresses a relation between the contents of our consciousness and the object of our knowledge" (*The Certainty of Faith* [trans. Harry der Nederlanden; Ontario: Paideia, 1980] 19).

[59] Bavinck, *RD*, 1:564.

[60] In this and the preceding analysis I am in agreement with Cornelis van der Kooi, "Inner Testimony," 108.

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An affirmation of this gap leads Bavinck to wonder how a correspondence may be established between the subject and object—a problem that Bavinck takes seriously. A reflection on the way the brain produces a mental image distinct from neural activity that communicates the world posits for one an "insoluble riddle."[61] A few pages later, Bavinck makes this riddle even more perplexing when he brings into consideration that the objects of science are not particulars but universals. The mind abstracts universals from individual particulars, but "the universality we express in a concept does not exist as such, as a universal, apart from us. . . . it has its basis in things and is abstracted from it and expressed in a concept by the activity of the intellect."[62] The universal in the mind is not in the particular; again, how does the concept in the mind actually help us "approximate" reality? Bavinck admits that it is "strange, even amazing, that converting mental representations into concepts and processing these again in accordance with the laws of thought, we should obtain results that correspond to reality."[63] When one couples this Aristotelian mode of thinking with Bavinck's affirmations concerning the mediating role of representations, the gap between subject and object is even clearer.

One wonders if Bavinck would have been vulnerable to the critiques lodged by Reid and Wolterstorff against Locke had he left matters there. However, as we have seen before, Bavinck admits of a correspondence between the two sides of the gap. Hank van den Belt summarizes Bavinck's understanding of truth as "correspondence of thought and reality, a relationship between the content of our consciousness and the object of our knowledge."[64] How exactly did he do this?

The fuller answer is found in an appeal to theology, specifically in three ways, peppered throughout the *Dogmatics* and other texts: (1) an organic ontology of creation, (2) the work of divine providence, and (3) the ongoing revealing activity of the Logos.

First, in Bavinck's theology one finds the Trinity occupying a central position. A Trinitarian doctrine of God implies a creation that reflects an organic unity and diversity—an interconnected whole that resists both the cacophonic diversity and static uniformity.[65] After his argument concerning the mind's constructive activity on the thing perceived, Bavinck invokes this idea: "Human beings are so richly endowed because they are linked with the objective world by a great many extremely diverse connections. They are related to the whole world. Physically, vegetatively, sensorily, intellectually, ethically, and religiously there is correspondence between them and the world; they are microcosms."[66] The world is intelligible and rational because a rational Creator is behind it, and the world is accessible to the human

[61] Bavinck, *RD*, 1:228.

[62] Ibid., 231.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Hank van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology*, 233.

[65] For a thorough account of Bavinck's organic worldview, see James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*.

[66] Bavinck, *RD*, 1:586.

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being because they are part of a larger organic whole. Bavinck redefines the organic motif by way of the Reformed orthodox tradition on which he stands, yet he locates its revival in the Romantic spirit of his day. So,

> The world by its very design is one organic whole. The two spheres, nature . . . and morality . . . , are most closely interconnected and interpenetrate each other at all times. The two, though certainly distinct, are never separated. One cannot designate a point in creation where the counsel and governance of God and the independent will and action of human beings begin. Especially *in this century* the historic and organic view of things has at every point driven out and condemned this Pelagian split.[67]

Here, then, is Bavinck's way of grounding his argument for a fit between the mind and the objects it perceives. This observation situates Bavinck's positive deployment of scholastic argumentation in his discussion of general epistemology. Bavinck finds a congeniality between his organic epistemology and the Greek philosophical principle that like is known by like, along with the scholastic affirmation concerning the distinction between the thing known by the mode of cognition, and the mode of the thing known.[68] Further, as David Sytsma notes, Thomas Aquinas also addressed similar questions concerning whether the contents of the mind (and the universals abstracted) do correspond with the reality outside of the mind.[69] Thomas, indeed, argues against the notion that "our cognitive faculties know only what is experienced within them, for instance, that the senses perceive only the impressions made on their organs."[70] Instead, Thomas argues that the objects of understanding "are the same as the objects of science," and that a binary between impressions and external objects imply the awkward consequence that knowledge is limited to appearances.[71] The principle "like is known by like" links with the Thomistic claim that human beings know both material and immaterial things because human beings, too, are

[67] Ibid., 2:376 [italics added]. Bavinck points to Romanticism as an origin of the organic idea, and to Hegel and Schleiermacher for their efforts to overcome subject and object in *RD* 1:260, 521.

[68] Ibid., 1:227.

[69] Sytsma, "Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology," 29 n. 83. Bavinck's use of Aquinas, however, should not eclipse the substantive criticisms Bavinck lodges against Aquinas throughout his oeuvre. Recent commentators also catalogue aspects of Bavinck's critique of Thomas. This includes critiques on Thomas's view of mystery and natural theology (in Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 97–99), on the function of proofs and ontology (in Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 14–15, 45, 132), and on the relationship between nature and grace and epistemology (in Brian Mattson, "A Soft Spot for Paganism?: Herman Bavinck and 'Insider Movements,'" *TBR* 4 (2013) 32–43, at 36, 40–42).

[70] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (trans. Michael Cardinal Browne; London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968) I, q. 85, a. 2. Hereafter, *ST*.

[71] Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 85, a. 2. See also *ST*, 1. Q. 79, 84, which deals specifically with the intellect and knowledge of material objects, respectively. For a nice elucidation of Thomas on the intellect and the soul in the act of perception, in relation to the claim that the human soul exists both subsistently and inherently, see Gyula Kilma, "Aquinas on the Materiality of the Human Soul and the Immateriality of the Human Intellect," *Philosophical Investigations* 32 (2009) 163–82.

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material and immaterial; the active intellect abstracts universals from the sensations that the material soul receives in perception.

Bavinck's appreciation of Thomas's response must be incorporated within his organic ontology (and epistemology) as a whole. That he conceptualized the problems of epistemology in terms of the subject-object dilemma, and that his response involves an appeal to a Trinitarian organic ontology in which subject and object are connected as distinct but in correspondence, show that Bavinck's epistemology cannot simply be identified with Thomas's. This reading takes into account the whole of Bavinck's work and pays attention not merely to the sources from which Bavinck draws, but also to what he does with them in his own unique deployment of the organic motif.[72] In other words, to say that Bavinck agrees with the Aristotelian principle that "like is known by like" is true, but insufficient. Rather, the subject knows the object because both represent diverse points in unity, an instantiation of interconnectedness emblematic of the unity-in-diversity exhibited in the Triune God's creation.

Second, Bavinck argues that the sovereign divine counsel further ensures the organic interconnectedness of all things. "Just as in any organism all the parts are interconnected and reciprocally determine each other, so the world as a whole is a masterpiece of divine art, in which all the parts are organically interconnected. And of that world, in all its dimensions, the counsel of God is the eternal design."[73] Bavinck grounds his belief in the organic shape of the sciences in this understanding of the vital unity of the divine decree.[74] When one positions Bavinck's discussion of the interconnectedness of each part in this organic whole with Bavinck's placement of subject and object, it becomes clear that for Bavinck ontology grounds epistemology—an organic coherence in ontology renders possible epistemological correspondence between representation and object.

These points are brought into greater clarity in *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing* as Bavinck explicitly connects the claim that organic correspondence obtains with the resources that one gleans from special revelation. He again argues that "the teaching of the creation of all things through the Word of God is the explanation

[72] Sytsma's analysis in "Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology," though thorough, moves back and forth between Bavinck's statements and the scholastic sources from which Bavinck drew. This creates the impression that Bavinck is merely reproducing those sources in an act of re-assertion. It seems more fruitful to me instead to pay attention to Bavinck's organic worldview first, and, taking that into account, then to interpret particular portions of his text—focusing on how he uses his sources more closely. However, even with that said, Sytsma's analysis pays more attention to Bavinck's scholastic (medieval and Reformed) sources within his discussion of general epistemology, while paying significantly less attention to Bavinck's appreciation of modern thinkers throughout his oeuvre and his structural use of the subject-object dilemma.

[73] Bavinck, *RD*, 2:392.

[74] Herman Bavinck, "The Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System," *TBR* 5 (trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman; 2014) 90–103 (especially pages 90–94); Herman Bavinck, 'Christendom en Natuurwetenschap' in *Kennis en Leven: Opstellen en artikelen uit vroegere jaren*, (ed. C. B. Bavinck; Kampen: Kok, 1922) 184–202, especially pages 201–202.

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of all knowing and knowledge, the presupposition of the correspondence between subject and object."[75] This is a great witness to the wisdom of the Christian faith, for only it uniquely declares the Trinitarian divine wisdom which creates the world in an "organic [*organische*]" manner, in which all things are closely related.[76]

Further, Bavinck affirms the ongoing work of the Logos in actively sustaining the subject-object relation. The revelatory work of the Logos that organically connects subject and object is indispensable, and "only in this way is science possible."[77] The Logos works with and through reason, enlightening it and guiding it in its attempts to apprehend the world, and is also the one who independently produces the contents in one's mind. In doing so, the Logos further ensures that the ideal representation in the mind is a faithful rendering of the world outside. This work is constant and dynamic, sustaining the epistemological situation and ensuring its relative stability and reliability.

If Bavinck's work can be called critical realism, it is so only in the sense that he accepts that (1) the mind plays a constructive role with respect to knowing and (2) reality remains reliably communicated in perception. The broadness of the term "critical realism," however, suggests that it is hardly adequate to capture the specificity and theologically grounded way in which Bavinck conceives of the act of knowing.[78] Terminology such as "Reformed-organic-realism" or, simply, an "organic epistemology," however less familiar, seems more adequate.

Coordinating Bavinck and Reid—and the Knowledge of God

The differences and similarities between Bavinck and Reid seem clear enough, but some further elucidation is appropriate. If one were to define both of their accounts, one may begin with Wolterstorff's own formalization of Reid's account of perception:

> S perceives O *if and only if* O affects one's sensory organs in such a way as to cause in S a sensory experience which is a sign (indicator) of O, which sensation in turn causes in S an apprehension of O, and an immediate belief about O whose predicative content is or implies that O exists as an entity in S's environment.[79]

[75] Bavinck, *Christelijke wereldbeschouwing*, 28. Dutch original: "De leer van de schepping aller dingen door het Woord Gods is de verklaring van alle kennen en weten, de onderstelling van de correspondantie tusschen subject en object."

[76] Ibid., 32–33. Brian Mattson observes that in such claims one can discern a transcendental direction in Bavinck's thinking in his *Restored to Our Destiny*, 36–37, 41–42, 44.

[77] Bavinck, *RD*, 1:231. The sense of possible, here, I take to be both metaphysical and epistemological. Only when one believes (epistemologically) in the work of Logos can one be warranted to believe that science is possible. Also, only because the Logos is actively working is science metaphysically possible.

[78] I am grateful to George Harinck for this suggestion.

[79] Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid*, 103.

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A formalization of Bavinck's account of the necessary conditions of knowledge would go something like this:

> S possesses an accurate mental representation of O *only if* (1) S and O are parts of a larger organic and created whole which (2) reflects an organic decree in the mind of a Triune Creator (3) while a revelatory connection is sustained between S and O by the work of the Second Person of the Trinity.[80]

One must, therefore, observe that Bavinck offers a theologically thicker description of how human knowers come to apprehend external objects. The Trinity occupies a central position; the being of God implies an ontology in creation whereby the whole reflects an organic unity and diversity. Not only so, an appeal to the ongoing work of the Second Person and the nature of the decree are indispensable for Bavinck's epistemology. This is so because Bavinck's epistemology freely uses the material content of Christian special revelation, and he is methodologically self-conscious in never treating the other subjects, epistemology included, apart from theology. Reid, on the other hand, makes little attempt at explaining the epistemological situation—one is hard-wired to believe the externality of the world and to rely on induction, and this is so because the Creator has made it so. But how he has made it so is of little interest to Reid—one must simply rest satisfied in this and continue on with the pursuit of practical wisdom. In Reid, one encounters little explicit reliance on the theological convictions of the Christian, nor do we see much of an encouragement that one ought to do so. Reid's account of epistemology could stand apart from explicitly Christian theological commitments and is quite consistent with a form of Deism.

This observation is not necessarily a criticism of Reid or a commendation of Bavinck, and perhaps it could simply be explained by the difference in the professions of the two thinkers and how they perceived those professions—that of a theologian and another of a philosopher.[81] Reid sought to give a more satisfying account of epistemology from the avenue of reason alone, and he may see himself as being no worse for doing so.

[80] As it stands Bavinck's account of the epistemic situation is externalist in character, but this may not be the whole picture. Further, I use the material conditional here (rather than the biconditional of Wolterstorff's presentation of Reid) to convey that Bavinck is interested not in discovering what needs rationally to be the case for subject and object to be in correspondence, but rather, Bavinck is explicating what he thinks Christian revelation displays to be the case when the correspondence is obtained.

[81] This, of course, depends upon whether one is convinced that a proper distinction should obtain between theology and philosophy, and on how one configures the relationship. For a recent monograph that does not follow this distinction, see Yadav, *The Problem of Perception*. Wolterstorff and Plantinga, in any case, hold to an Augustinian model of Christian philosophy, according to which the deliverances of faith should be freely deployed in one's philosophical work. See Wolterstorff, "How Philosophical Theology Became Possible," 167–68; Alvin Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," *The Monist* 75 (1992) 316–20. On the way in which Wolterstorff's theology of Shalom informs his philosophical theorizing, see Nathan D. Shannon, *Shalom and the Ethics of Belief: Nicholas Wolterstorff's Theory of Situated Rationality* (Eugene, OR: PickWick, 2015).

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How one can acquire knowledge of God in Reid's case, then, should be clear enough. As Wolterstorff applies Reid, he says:

> On [the reidian] picture, how might God be gotten in mind? Notice that Kant's use of the metaphor of boundary no longer has applicability. We no longer have to suppose that the applicability of our concepts is confined to our intuitions. So one way we might get God in mind is by the use of definite descriptions. . . . And secondly, it may be that some human beings have God in mind as that of which they were aware. For a possibility that we now have to take seriously is that human beings might sometimes have awareness of God.[82]

In this framework one may, as Wolterstorff thinks, have a direct apprehension of God himself. Just as in my perceiving a table I am directly apprehending just the table itself, unattended by some representation of that table in my mind, so as when God is before one, one encounters God in an immediate and apprehensive way. One is aware of God, and Wolterstorff leaves it at that.

How, and in what sense, then, does knowledge of God obtain for Bavinck, given the account of correspondence that he provides? Here, again, Bavinck's context as a Reformed theologian must be kept in mind. In Bavinck's view, the question of how a creature can have knowledge of the Creator is inextricable from the affirmation that the two entities are not in the same scale of being. Creator and creature are separated by an ontological chasm that is only bridgeable by the free decision of God to condescend in revelation. God's revelation is thus always ectypal and analogical, in correspondence with an archetypal knowledge of himself that remains incommunicable. It is therefore only because God reveals himself in both general and special revelation that humanity can, indeed, apprehend and know God. For Bavinck, however, the creature may accurately know God but can never know God in an archetypal manner, never in a way that God knows himself.

The question that arises in this context, naturally, is whether one can have a higher, direct, knowledge of God as God is in himself when the creature is included among the blessed in heaven. Here Bavinck affirms that the "Bible indeed teaches that the blessed in heaven behold God, but does not go into any detail and elsewhere expressly calls God invisible."[83] This beholding of God is certainly higher than the knowledge of God that one attains as sojourners on earth. However, Bavinck reminds the reader that in every case humans are always finite and God remains infinite—even in heaven knowledge of God is only analogical in character. Further, how exactly does the finitude of humanity render a direct apprehension of God's essence impossible? Here Bavinck's answer is clearly connected to his analysis of epistemology in the *Prolegomena*: "Humans . . . can never have more than a finite human vision of God. Hence, whereas the *object* may be infinite, its *representation*

[82] Wolterstorff, "Is it Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover From Kant?," 18.
[83] Bavinck, *RD*, 2:190.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816017000414 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in the human consciousness is and remains finite."[84] In other words, humanity as creatures can only know in a creaturely mode, and a necessary aspect of knowing in this mode is that creatures know objects by way of finite representations. This basic feature of creaturely knowing remains unaltered by the entrance into the state of glory, and as such even there one cannot apprehend God directly. There remains a distinction between the mental representation and the object in itself. Interestingly, however, Bavinck accepts this as an appropriate articulation and epistemological implication of the classical Reformed doctrine of the Creator-creature distinction: "A corollary of vision of God in his essence would be the deification of humanity and the erasure of the boundary between the Creator and the creature."[85]

This account of the apprehension of God certainly deploys different concepts from Wolterstorff's appropriation of Reid. However, this is not to say that Wolterstorff or Reid would believe that one can behold God archetypally either—it merely suggests that, given the account of perception provided by Wolterstorff and Reid, the question of how a finite representation can confer reliable knowledge of God would not emerge at all. Since the epistemological situation, for them, is that one can apprehend objects directly, it can be asserted that in this same way one can apprehend God directly. Bavinck, however, does not find accepting the distinction between the object in itself (in this case, God) and the ideal representation in the mind to be problematic for a robust affirmation of the possibility of apprehending God. Human beings, for Bavinck, can only know in this mode, and must trust that the representations by which they know objects communicate faithfully those objects by virtue of the sovereign revelatory work of God.

It turns out, then, that Bavinck and Reid offer two distinct accounts of perception and of subject-object correspondence. This is not to suggest that in Bavinck's epistemology there exists no reidian elements. Repeatedly Bavinck argues that one can spontaneously know the world prior to reasoning or demonstration, even appealing to commonsense philosopher G. E. Moore in one crucial location to defend this claim.[86] Perhaps a further analysis of Bavinck on warrant, then, may show the most reidian elements of Bavinck's thought.

[84] Ibid. [italics added]. Following Schleiermacher, Bavinck argues that the "core of our self-consciousness is, as Schleiermacher perceived much more clearly than Kant, not autonomy but a sense of dependence. In the act of becoming conscious of ourselves we become conscious of ourselves as creatures" (*Philosophy of Revelation*, 66). Revelation is located in the outside world and internally, directly, in consciousness: "Not evolution, but revelation, is the secret of the mind; in our-selfconsciousness, independently of our co-operation and apart from our will, the reality of our ego and of the world is revealed to us" (Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 69). Cf. Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism: On Catholicity, Consciousness, and Theological Epistemology," *SJT* 70 (2017) 310–32.

[85] Ibid., 190.

[86] Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 325 n. 20.

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