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Engaging the Mental Wars of Our Times



by Jan van Vliet

Statement of the Challenge: “Let’s Blame the French”

Not long ago a leading newsmagazine proclaimed that the popular Low-Carb Atkins diet is all but dead. The article, titled “Low-Carb Lament,” gave statistics and documentary evidence suggesting the rapid rise, sustained popularity, and then collapse of the low-carb diet industry that flourished for only about a decade.¹ Even though that same low-carb diet is again becoming popular with the advent of the paleolithic diet,² its rise and fall might be a good metaphor for this question of postmodernism: Do there lie within postmodernism the

seeds of its own destruction?

A new ethos has become overwhelmingly dominant in the academy. Whether its attendant mood was first pitched from this particular gatekeeper—academia—or from another, as some would argue, doesn’t really matter. “Postmodernism” has now gained admission into the culture at large. This new spirit rather successfully insinuated itself within the icons of early 21st-century Western civilization. By this I mean the institutions regulating political-economic life, the media, fashion, Hollywood, art, architecture, and, yes, even some quarters of the church, that old bastion of tradition and “truth.” But Postmodernism has gone further than merely insinuation, although this is always a first and necessary step. It is responsible for the reconstruction of pretty much everything, from office buildings to systems of thought. It has come to roost, permanently it would appear (if it really ever left at all), in the ivory tower of the academy, from whence it now promulgates its “new” philosophy.

It was only after a French intellectual elite articulated its opposition to certain Enlightenment principles that “postmodernism” became common currency. Now, this turn is not necessarily bad; I think it is generally agreed that all new systems of thought, theologies, belief systems are created almost overwhelmingly because of initial opposition to existing norms and patterns. But this oppositional stance is hardly how new life is sustained. In other words, some positive distinctives must shine forth from the new system of thought, in this case, to lend it credibility and provide its permanent authenticity and legitimacy. That is to say, we derive our enduring identity from what we *are*, not from

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what we *oppose*. And postmodernism has certainly done this as well. That is why we call it “deconstruction” rather than “destruction.”

In its opposition to Modernism, the postmodern mind identifies itself as placing the central assumptions of Enlightenment epistemology under interrogation. These assumptions have to do with the following Enlightenment myths:

- 1) the myth of progress: *not* necessarily good, from our observations of known realities;
- 2) the myth of truth: *not* certain and purely rational, but instead emotive and intuitive and discovered in community;
- 3) and the myth of knowledge: *not* objective, because historically and culturally conditioned.

In the face of the postmodern claim (itself totalizing, notice) that truth is found only in community, it is notable that Bloom uses this concept of “community” to describe that one universal group of seekers of transcendent truth.

In fact, this postmodern idea extends beyond our perceptions of truth to its essence: there is no *absolute* truth. Truth only exists relative to the community in which its believer participates. These ideas, it is held, are the logical outgrowth of the chief emblems of Modernism—Western dominance, Christianity, free market economics, and individualism. This about-face from the Modernist assumptions—the “post-modern turn”—has led to an “uncentering” (decentering?) of the ethos of society, what Michel Foucault (1926-84) calls “heterotopia.” It is heterogeneity that most captures 21st-century pluralism.

This decentered ethos drives—and is itself driven by—a literary theory called *deconstruction*. This theory has great import for “doing theology.” Because there can be no totalizing epistemological

frame of reference (overwhelming ethos), knowledge has been replaced with interpretation (specific impact). And while the vehicle of communication is still language, language is itself interpretation. Truth, then, is a construct of its discourse.³ To see truth otherwise is to impose one’s value-laden and totalizing meanings on another. Foucault, nothing if not consistent, argued that this imposition is the ultimate act of aggression. Communication thus becomes hostile discourse, dangerous in its subversive tendencies because of the implicit exertion of illegitimate power. Although Foucault died before he could make this final assertion, to take his position to the logical conclusion would be to say that the optimal world is the world of silence.

More to the point for our purposes, post-structuralist Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) sought to destroy all writing by demonstrating its inevitable falsehood. As the “chief theoretical architect of deconstruction,”⁴ Derrida applied very specifically to literary theory the more comprehensive attitude and practice applied to all human knowledge, language, and behavior. Broadly speaking, the purpose of deconstruction was an *exposé* of the West’s singularly oppressive treatment of all non-Western people groups, women, non-Caucasians, and non-heterosexuals. This oppression resulted from the prevailing social constructs (what I have called cultural gatekeepers), which reflected superiority, prejudice, aggression, and marginalization. Everyday language is not neutral, said Derrida, echoing Foucault. Literary theory must be overhauled, and it must lose its claim to meaning.

In this regard it was not all well, however, between Foucault and Derrida. Because Foucault saw Descartes as the epitome of the Age of Reason, Derrida held that Foucault, in using the language of reason to defend Descartes’s method, was himself a victim (and thus product) of Enlightenment thinking and thus betrayed himself as a subscriber to the Enlightenment’s prevailing episteme.

According to Derrida, a text does not necessarily reflect one prevailing power structure; instead, any text can hold a multitude of interpretations, even if the author’s own meaning can be ascertained. What is important, no, *the only thing possible*, is interpretation because the author himself or herself cannot escape his or her own ties to the

episteme of the prevailing culture. All meaning, then, is socially contrived, so there can be no totalizing meaning/truth. In fact, “objectivity” and “truth” are myth, a group’s story. By definition, then, to claim objective truth for your “story” is to dismiss all others’ stories or “truths” as false.

Meeting The Challenge in the Theological Task: Or “How We Got Here”

In this “postmodern”⁵ period, when all stories claim equal validity, Nancy Murphy reminds us that fundamentalism and liberalism have proceeded along separate theological tracks but all the while are indebted to one intellectual lineage, joined at the philosophical hip, so to speak. The track, she says, begins at the trunk from rationalist Descartes (1596-1650); proceeds along the thought of the first of the holy trinity of classical British empiricists, John Locke of *tabula rasa* fame (1632-1704); and ends with the third, skeptic Scotsman David Hume (1711-76). And here comes the fork in the road. It was “common sense” realist Thomas Reid (1710-96) who built upon this common intellectual dependency to provide the superstructure of the Princeton theology (and thus fundamentalism/evangelicalism). The theological counterpart, liberalism, driven by co-dependent Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), had its post-Humean origins with Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), whose dogmatic slumber was so rudely interrupted by empiricist Hume’s radical skepticism. Recognizing this common intellectual heritage helps us set up our theological how-to model, conceived a little more broadly.

But we must go beyond mere recognition of these common intellectual roots. We are called to defend the concept of transcendent truth, a norm for belief and behavior that is beyond and above ourselves. There is, I want to argue, a real and true metaphysic. What’s more, this truth can be known truly, if not exhaustively. There is a true and discoverable ontology, epistemology, and ethic. And those are grounded in the creator/creature relationship. These are the foundations and presuppositions upon which the task of pedagogy and learning progress. We do not have the luxury to engage in *abstract* philosophizing for its own sake, although there is fundamentally nothing wrong

with seeking truth as an end in itself. One will ultimately be led to contemplation of the divine, even by this route. But this is not Athens of old. So I want to bring one more weapon (is this not just one more dimension of the current “cultural wars”?) into my methodological armory.

I introduce the thought of one Allan Bloom, a “front-line fighter in the mental wars of our times.”⁶ In 1987 this highly-esteemed Jewish-American intellectual rocked first the academic world and then mainstream culture with his massive critique of American (read Western) education:

The real community of man, in the midst of all the self-contradictory simulacra⁷ of community, is the community of those who seek truth, of the potential knowers . . . of all men to the extent they desire to know. But in fact, this includes only a few, the true friends, as Plato was to Aristotle at the very moment they were disagreeing about the nature of the good. They were absolutely one soul as they looked at the problem. This, according to Plato, is the only real friendship, the only real common good. . . . They have a true community that is exemplary for all the other communities.⁸

In the face of the post-modern claim (itself totalizing, notice) that truth is found only in community, it is notable that Bloom uses this concept of “community” to describe that one universal group of seekers of *transcendent* truth. Other communities, claims Bloom, are but “simulacra,” pretenders, to true community. And he does so in language that we (and even his 1987 contemporaries) would consider highly politically incorrect (because it is totalizing and oppressive). The motive for Bloom’s remarks, the form and content, the words used and the message conveyed (Man, Truth, Knowers, the Good) must sound odd, even offensive to (post)modern ears. How would Foucault or Derrida respond to such “totalizing” claims? The line is drawn in the sand.

Why does Bloom make this assertion? In his penetrating and luminous analysis of what he calls “the closing of the American mind,” Bloom suggests that Descartes and Pascal “afford a peculiar and powerful perspective on life’s perennial problems. They weave the fabric of souls.”⁹ The intellectual history and literary tradition of (first, France,

and then) the West, has historically produced what he terms a “cast of mind.”

Descartes and Pascal represent a choice between reason and revelation, science and piety, the choice from which everything else follows.... These great opponents, whom no synthesis can unite...set in motion a dualism that we recognize when we speak of both French clarity and of French passion.... Both Enlightenment and Catholic thought have found their special home in France for more than three centuries. Descartes and Pascal gave accounts . . . of the West’s common faith, Christianity, and at the same time situated them with respect to that other, more distant, source of inspiration, Greece.¹⁰

Bloom even asserts that the ground of this “common faith” was the Bible. Scripture is a “means to furnish the mind,” for a “life based on the Book is closer to the truth [...] it provides the material for deeper research in and access to the real nature of things.... [W]ithout a book of similar gravity, the mind remains unfurnished.”¹¹ These resources deepen and broaden our *intellectual horizon* in our search for ultimate meaning. In consequence, Bloom’s assessment of the post-structural drift in Western culture is not optimistic. The postmodern ethos, laments Bloom, is the final, and not entirely unexpected, step in the utter dissolution of the search for meaning in the West:

[Postmodernism] is the last predictable stage in the suppression of reason and the denial of the possibility of truth in the name of philosophy.... A cheapened interpretation of Nietzsche liberates us from the objective imperatives of the texts that might have liberated us from our increasingly low and narrow horizon.¹²

Before we proceed to our lesson from history and then to a brief examination of what we can learn from this for the task of doing theology in the 21st-century postmodern ethos, consider a brief word on Blaise Pascal (1623-62).¹³ Interestingly, the skeptical arguments raised in his *Pensees* were originally intended to deny the possibility of knowledge. But like Descartes’ *Meditations*, Pascal’s work tries to apply them to a positive end. Pascal demonstrates the explanatory superiority of Christianity that makes Christian belief rational.

Thus, even while holding that “the heart has its reasons which reason does not know,” Pascal works in the shadow of Descartes. The former’s unique apologetic attempt makes singular reliance on reason and probability (or relies solely on reason and probability?). It is only in the context of his broader *Pensees* that a distinct presuppositional approach becomes evident. Only in this way can he use reason (practical) to demonstrate the inadequacy of reason (evidential).

In addressing the task of theology, can we be refreshingly syncretistic? Can we have our epistemological cake and eat it too? Why can we not have God, Descartes, and Pascal, all three? I suggest that this approach may be the only hope we have to do theology in this post-Enlightenment context.

Having set the rules of the game, so to speak, (common intellectual heritage, the centrality of “community” as seekers of transcendent truth,” and Pascal’s bold use of reason to supplant its own centrality), I now want to illustrate how this kind of a model can help us in the theological task. We

Puritan theologian William Ames (1576–1633) came on the scene in the development of theological system at a time when the influence of Aristotle had made significant resurgence in the academies of Europe.

can learn from a great example of pre-Enlightenment philosophical/epistemological syncretism that gave post-Reformation theology a very strong push in the direction of further development and refinement: the theologian William Ames.

A Lesson from the Early Seventeenth Century: “Or Jerusalem and Athens and the French”
Puritan theologian William Ames (1576-1633)

came on the scene in the development of theological system at a time when the influence of Aristotle had made significant resurgence in the academies of Europe. Stripped of his academic degrees at the University of Cambridge in 1610 for refusing to relent of a “rigid” sort of Puritanism, Ames set off for the refreshingly freer intellectual climes of the United Provinces. After brief sojourns in The Hague, Leiden, and Dordrecht, where he was advisor to the president of that great synod (1618), he was appointed to the faculty of the Franeker Academy in 1620. It was from this intellectual backwater that Ames wielded tremendous power and influence from study and lectern and, occasionally, from pulpit. With the likes of Ames on its faculty, however, the reputation of Franeker rapidly and ever so briefly came to rival the better-known and prestigious University of Leiden. Indeed, it was to this geographical outpost of early modern Europe that the brightest students from all corners of Europe gravitated. Interestingly, one Rene Descartes enrolled April 16, 1629, surely among the most famous of Franeker’s early seventeenth-century students. It was in Franeker, right under the nose of Ames, that Descartes composed his *Meditations* (while *Discourse* was written in Leeuwarden, the capital of Friesland). “I think I have found,” he wrote in 1630, “how one can demonstrate metaphysical truth in such a way which is more evident than the demonstrations of geometry.”¹⁴ Now it is highly unlikely he learned this in the Learned Doctor Ames’ class on Moral Theology.

The Academy had been established in 1585 to perpetuate the Calvinistic faith in northern Netherlands. But the legacy of Aristotle reigned supreme, and Ames found himself doing intellectual/theological battle on three fronts rather than the two which he was expecting, in which he was specialist, and for which he had been appointed to the faculty. Thus, in addition to the war against popery and Arminianism, in the form of Jesuit Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) and Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) and his ilk respectively, Professor Ames was pushed into battle with the ghost of Aristotle in the form of faculty colleagues.

For our purposes, it is of great interest how this war was fought. Ames retained significant

traces of Aristotle’s method, even as he eschewed The Philosopher’s metaphysic. For Ames there was no place for speculative philosophy, only biblical revelation. Aristotle drove a bifurcation between speculative science (theoretical) and practical science (ethics). This Aristotelian distinction between theoretical and practical, Ames held, had no place in the Protestant academy. In fact, he appropriated wholesale the entire epistemological content of one Peter Ramus (1515-72), the spectacular French philosopher of the sixteenth century who was killed in the famous massacre of St. Bartholomew’s Day in Paris. As a French Humanist and pedagogue, Ramus sought to democratize education and came into immediate conflict with the more aristocratic tradition of Scholastic method (Aristotle). Following his conversion and as a Huguenot, Ramus believed that concepts and abstractions of the human mind draw their validity, not from temporal or expedient constructs but from eternal truth in the mind of God. Universals, he held, are inferred from humanity’s experience and then related to infinity; they are not known through syllogistic argumentation from universal principles that are merely probable. Absolute truth becomes available through the careful analysis of human perception. These facts could be analyzed in a series of successive dichotomies. This method of logic came to be called the Ramist method. And the only and ultimate goal of the Ramist philosophy was the practical utility of the arts (learning) for everyday life. Ramism came to be considered a genuinely Christian, even Calvinistic philosophy.¹⁵

The sea change that Ames’ appropriation of Ramism meant for traditional developing Reformation theology can be seen in his definition of theology. “Theology,” opined Ames, “is the doctrine or teaching [*doctrina*] of living to God.” In one sentence he dismissed all earlier rationalistic definitions of theology by centering sacred doctrine in what one *did*.

At the same time, however, Ames knew how to despoil the Egyptians. Syllogistic reasoning had a central place in the logic of “Dr. Dialectician” himself, even as he dismissed the author. Aristotle could still be plundered. Aristotle could make sense of observed reality by reasoning syllogistically from major premise to conclusion in the fol-

lowing way:

Major premise: "All men are mortal" [universal from observed *experience*];

Minor premise: "Socrates is a man" [from observation];

Deduction: "Socrates is mortal" [necessary conclusion].

Ames could conclude from the major premise with the use of *scriptural* principles:

Major premise: "He that lives in sin shall die" [universal from *scripture*];

Minor premise: "I live in sin [judgment of the conscience measuring behavior against the *synderesis*, the standard of *scripture*, the moral law];

Deduction: "I shall die" [necessary conclusion].

Ames' deductive logic is syllogistically demonstrated precisely as Aristotle would have required, with this exception: *Scripture* represents the eternal and abiding universals and the measure against which

We recognize the existence of transcendent truth that we as image-bearing creatures of God are equipped to access.

the minor premise is judged. The conclusion (deduction) flows purely from measuring behavior against Scripture and then submitting to scriptural universals (the major premise). Ames demonstrates that what some consider to be the intellectually vilest and most brutish form of Aristotelian reductionism can be applied to sacred truth.

This demonstration shows, however briefly, that during this pre-Enlightenment period there were many points of intersection among Aristotle, Descartes, rationalism, Scripture, and the task of theology. Rationalism was there; Descartes just hadn't articulated it yet. And what Derrida said of Foucault, we could say of Pascal: he, too, was immersed in Descartes. If Ames had lived even a half-generation longer, he would have been sandwiched between Aristotle and Descartes. Where would he have settled?¹⁶ The difference lies in the presuppo-

sitions one brings to the epistemological task. And this is exactly my point. Without an authoritative outside source, we come ungrounded, decentered, and have no functional operational grid in which, in this case, to do theology. We saw that both Ames and Pascal used the available epistemological techniques to advance theology as, ultimately, something you do. *Science advances piety.*

Application for Today: "Will That Be French Cuisine or the Atkins Diet?"

Suggestions and recommendations on how to do theology in this current intellectual climate abound. An entire sub-industry has developed around this issue. Publications of all manner proliferate, from popular how-to's to heavier tomes and more significant assessments and evaluations. I am not going to repeat these here, although I will use some of the ideas proposed. But first, let's go to a recent news report for inspiration.

It might be true that our mental health, in its totality, has been for too long dominated by the high carb bread and pasta created on the epistemological threshing floor of the Modernity project. Perhaps not all progress is good. It demonstrably has not been good for all. Perhaps we have been too glib in the "certainty" of our version of the truth and have been closed to the clamor of other voices, raised often in opposition. But should we cut out an entire food group? Are the high-fat, high-cholesterol foods offered by post-structuralism really that good for us as a singular dietary source? We are prepared and advised to jettison the old thinking that you can't get enough protein, but too much of the protein of poststructuralism is not good either. It comes with all that unhealthy fat and cholesterol. Does this not argue for balance, for revisiting how truth is interpreted and delivered?

In adjusting to the intellectual and epistemological exigencies of today, we are called to re-examine our diet. Whatever diet we choose, we must all agree that we do need food. It is a question of finding the balanced diet that meets and exceeds all competing claims and interpretations of the truth.

But there are some irreducible minima in whatever diet we adopt. My survey from the avail-

able epistemological (and theological) smorgasbord leads me to load my plate with at least the following non-negotiable food groups:

(1) We recognize the existence of *transcendent truth* that we as image-bearing creatures of God are equipped to access. Theories of “truth” which deny the correspondence view ultimately fall short.¹⁷ In other words, our theories correctly describe reality, which exists independent of any knower. Reality is not a social construct. This world has objective features of the good, the true, and the beautiful to which we can make appeal. The problem lies with us. Pascal said “truth is so obscured nowadays, and lies so well established, that unless we love the truth we shall never recognize it.”¹⁸ Perhaps the deconstructionists rather than Bible believers are the obscurantists. Truth “must have its way with us.” We have not handled truth properly. We have not understood truth truly. We have not sought truth unswervingly. We have not pursued truth conscientiously. We have not commended it to others compellingly. We have not applied truth consistently in our presentation of theology and in listening to other peoples’—other communities’—stories. That we must repent of. Because we do not live up to the standard does not mean we throw away the standard and seek new ones or deny claims to any standard. “For the idea of truth is part of the intellectual oxygen we breathe.”¹⁹

(2) The truth of which we speak and from which we derive universal meaning is found in *Scripture*. Scripture is our basic source of evidence because inspired and infallible. The text of Scripture yields its meaning absolutely and truly. We understand it neither truly nor exhaustively. We have grossly underestimated the noetic effects of sin if we have thought about it at all. We have used language wrongly. And there is a way in which we must listen better to the marginalized voices as we seek to appropriate biblical truth. I see Scripture as theology’s “foundation,” *both* propositional and functional.

(3) There is a *transcendent metanarrative*. The problem is in my telling of it, in my interpretation of it. Certain things are ontologically true. Not all evangelical theology can be written off to “the legacy of Protestant scholastic rationalism.” Who would have thought that the arms of the

Princeton/Westminster theology had such a reach for the worse!²⁰ If you are a broad-sweeping Nancey Murphy-style anti-foundationalist in theological construction, then Scripture can claim no authority. In her world, narrative hermeneutic is to be applied to even the most didactic text.²¹ Doctrines were developed through history to shape the life of the Christian community. There lies in the biblical narrative the Christian worldview.

(4) But as a member of the *community of faith* I don’t interpret only in light of my own community. It is not the postmodern understanding of community-derived truth which coexists easily alongside other such truths. The comfortable coexistence of such truths entails a radical kind of relativism. But it is also recognizing that doctrines of the “community of faith” do not set the “rules for discourse,” as Kevin Vanhoozer has so rightly reminded us. Authority does not reside in how Christian readers of Scripture use Scripture; doctrinal authority derives from how the biblical authors, authorized by God’s Spirit, use terms such as “God,” “grace,” and “salvation.” *This* is how the transcendent metanarrative must be told. Vanhoozer’s approach preserves Scripture as the Church’s foundation of faith, retains the correspondence theory of truth, and refreshingly—no, necessarily—reminds us of the Reformation principle of the priesthood of individual believers in our efforts to do theology rightly because we have the capacity—and therefore the *responsibility*—to do it rightly. He says,

Right theological judgment is the product of human cognitive action that has been nurtured by divine canonical action concerning right covenantal relations. The canon is nothing less than a unique and indispensable framework—the spectacles of faith, as Calvin put it—that enables us faithfully to imagine (to see and to taste) the world as it is in Christ, the “wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24), or in other words, as it really is.²²

(5) One more word on method, and that is *humility*. At times our approach has been triumphal. We have played fast and loose with the biblical message because it is the truth. But we have been unfaithful to the task to which we have been called. Have we arrogantly imposed our own (typically

Western) “narrative-based experience” on foundational truth, even as we sought to share its propositional nature? A good argument could be made that the fundamental doctrines of the faith have been affirmed in an unwarranted triumphalism that has led to an arrogant elitism. Although there is a place for holy anger and righteous indignation (as Jesus himself showed us), such is typically not the winsome route. The epistemic humility virtuously invoked by some post-structuralists—that you really can’t know anything for certain—I want to invoke too, but not as an apology by which I can now dismiss the indubitability of Christian theism. A new fresh humility can characterize our approach to both the appropriation and the promulgation of scriptural truth. There can be no doubt about its veracity.

(6) Finally, we view humanity as *unified in its constitution*. Perhaps the more radical postmodernists are the product of the fragmentation of the unified individual? Why such a distinction between the intellect, the will, and the affections? It appears postmodernists would have us all be the epistemological fatalities of faculty psychology, itself a late-Enlightenment emblem. But that is not how Scripture presents humanity created in God’s image-bearing capacity. This was always Princeton’s emphasis (Charles Hodge’s, especially). This was the grand presupposition of William Ames as he chafed against the Aristotelian division between knowing and doing, epistemology and ethics. This is where Ramus came in. Without this synergistic understanding of the faculties of humanity, our understanding of reason will only be seriously attenuated. Reason is also moral and not merely rational. It is surely true that the Modern mind represents the best example in history of human pride in the exaltation of the human intellect. But it is the intellect engaging an outside authority that makes it moral and “non-neutral.”²³ Ames took Aristotle, brought the foundational truth of Scripture to bear, and with the pedagogically-oriented epistemological equipment of Ramus, made it functional as well.²⁴

In conclusion, I would suggest that we recover the center as we apply these principles to our appropriation, understanding, and teaching of theology. And we will do this in community in a

spirit of cooperation and humility as members of a community, that “community of those who seek truth,” to use Bloom’s phrase, that universal, supracultural, timeless truth. And whether Bloom is right that “postmodernity is a fad,” much like the Atkins Diet appears to have been, perhaps news of its death is exaggerated. Whatever the case, we need to enter the conversation as disputants more than “conversers” because the “disputation model,” argues Vanhoozer, better captures the seriousness of the matter.²⁵

Meanwhile, I want to assert that in this disputation model we can and must use Aristotle, Descartes, Pascal, and pre-existing epistemological methodology and categories to arrive at the truth as it is in Scripture. Only in Scripture are Pascal and Descartes *not* those “great opponents, whom no synthesis can unite.”²⁶ We can use both to find God, not exclusively, but as one of our main food groups. And, at the very least, Foucault and Derrida provide interesting appetizers.

That’s my diet, and I’m sticking with it. *Bon Appetit.*

Endnotes

1. *Macleans* January 17, 2005, 42-47.
2. Lisa Scherzer, “The Atkins Diet Fad: Set for a Comeback,” *The Exchange*, September 17, 2013. Accessed July 28, 2014, <http://www.yahoo.com>.
3. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1969).
4. Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (New York: Harper and Row, 1991), 102.
5. A “highly-contested” term according to, among many, Nancey Murphy in *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 5.
6. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 12.
7. Likenesses, semblances, mock appearances. A simulacrum is a sham, usually in a derogatory sense.
8. Bloom, *Closing*, 381-2.
9. *Ibid.*, 52.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 60. This precise concern explains the existence

- of Harold Bloom's *magnum opus*, *The Western Canon* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994). Bloom dismisses Foucault's "death of the author" as "anticanonical myth." "Those who teach interpretation have more in common with the Sophists than with Socrates" (39-40).
12. *Ibid.*, 379.
 13. See my "Gambling on Faith: A Holistic Examination of Blaise Pascal's Wager," *Westminster Theological Journal* 62 (2000): 33-63.
 14. Renatus des Cartes, Gallus, Philosophus (Apr. 16, 1629), *Album Academiae Franekerensis*, eds. S. J. Fockema and Th. Meijer (N.P., Franeker, 1968), folio 133; J. Millet, *Histoire de Descartes avant 1637* (Paris, 1867), 203-4; cited in Keith Springer, *The Learned Doctor William Ames* (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois, 1972), 80. See also Jan van Vliet, "William Ames: Marrow of the Theology and Piety of the Reformed Tradition," (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2002), 19-25,
 15. *William Ames: Technometry*, trans. introduced and commentary by Lee W. Gibbs (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 21-25; see also van Vliet, "Ames," 152-71.
 16. The philosophical struggle in the United Provinces ("unprecedented in European history since ancient times") was just getting started during Ames' life. It was in the late 1640s that this struggle reached unprecedented heights in the Dutch academies, particularly at Leiden and Utrecht. Jonathan Israel identifies the split to have been between the "philosophical conservatives"—"broadly the scholastic Aristotelians"—and "innovators, primarily Cartesians intent on revolutionizing . . . even Bible criticism and theology, along the lines of Descartes' mechanistic world-view." The former were best represented by Calvinist Gisbertus Voetius; the latter had as head covenant theologian Johannes Cocceius. See Israel's *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 24-25. There were some interesting interconnections here: first, Voetius and Ames were spiritual kin and ecclesiastical contemporaries if not particularly strong kindred spirits. Voetius remained Aristotelian while Ames opted for Ramus. Second, Cocceius was a student of Ames and furthered Ames' covenant theology; see my "Decretal Theology and the Development of Covenant Thought: An Assessment of Cornelius Graafland's Thesis with a Particular View to Federal Architects William Ames and Johannes Cocceius" *WTJ*, 62 (2001): 393-420. An interesting point of speculation in this intellectual history would be where Ames would have located himself in the Voetius/Aristotelian and Cocceius/Cartesian debate that later raged in the Dutch academies.
 17. As articulated by Douglas Groothuis in "Why Truth Matters Most: An Apologetic for Truth-Seeking in Post-Modern Times," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47.3 (September 1, 2004): 441-54.
 18. Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, ed. Alban Krailsheimer (New York: Pilgrim, 1966), 739, 864, cited in Groothuis, 446-47.
 19. Groothuis, 441.
 20. A characterization of postconservative evangelicalism; see P. K. Helseth, "Are Postconservatives Fundamentalist? Postconservative Evangelicalism, Old Princeton, and the Rise of New-Fundamentalism," *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, eds. Millard J. Ericson, Paul Kjos Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 223-50.
 21. See her well-articulated position in *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 105. See Chad Owen Brand's incisive critique in "Defining Evangelicalism," *Reclaiming the Center*, 281-304, particularly 298-301.
 22. "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal About The Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker, 2000), 85; cited in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, eds. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjos Helseth and Justin Taylor (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2004), 157.
 23. As Iain Murray has also observed in *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Edinburgh: Banner of truth, 2000), 197 and cited in Helseth, "Are Postconservative Evangelicals Fundamentalists," 238.
 24. And thus addressing the issue of functionality in truth raised by Robert E. Webber and addressed by Helseth, 247-48.
 25. In "Pilgrim's Digress: Christian Thinking on and about the Post/Modern Way," *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos: 2005), 71-103, particularly 72-74.
 26. Bloom, *American Mind*, 52.