

interpretation—for all the reasons you gave—comes with its own guarantee."

"Yes, but the problem is even more radical than your way of putting it. The mind has no way to *compare* outside reality with its own interpretations of it. Strictly speaking, we have no way of knowing whether there's a mind-independent reality that corresponds with how we take things to be. There is no way—even in principle—to climb over, or to outflank, our interpretations to check their *real* fit against a reality that remains unaffected by our interpretative efforts. To use the jargon, there are no presupposition-free, theory-neutral, or value-independent interpretations. Ironically, I think, Van Til's own work in Christian apologetics makes this rather Kantian point his theoretical centerpiece; contemporary philosophy of science does so as well—for example, in the writings of Thomas Kuhn."

"Why do you say there's irony in Van Til's position?" asked Schroeder.

"Oh, because so very much of his polemical writing against adversaries of Christianity is framed in terms of what he sees as disastrous in Kant. Van Til doesn't *call* his presuppositions 'categories of the understanding,' but clearly a Van Tillian presupposition has the same *epistemological function*. To wit: presuppositions bring noetic structure to what would otherwise be incomprehensible and unknowable. That's exactly what Kant's mental categories do."

"And the *externalist* horn of the dilemma?" pressed Schroeder.

"Well, we've really already covered that. The ideal for knowledge of others and scientific knowledge is for the knower to be in reliable cognitive touch with whomever and whatever is *actually* out there. Negatively put, the ideal is to avoid getting cognitively short-changed in this regard by brain function, silly or false presuppositions, or just bad lighting, bad acoustics, etc. But we can't embrace pure externalism, it would seem, unless we can somehow eliminate the problematic "buffer zone" of interpretation between our minds and what's out there. A purely causal theory of knowledge might do that but that has looked impossible to anyone who has considered it."