

An Introduction to Christ & Academic Culture

Toward Integrality and Flourishing as a Christian Academic

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For the Christian Faculty Network at CSU

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Disclaimer: I am not speaking as a representative of the CFN at CSU or as a representative of CSU or any educational or government agency.

I'm speaking for myself about some issues I've thought a lot about and wish to discuss with you because I think they're highly relevant for Christians in higher education. Reasonable people can disagree with me!

Finally, I encourage all listeners to think critically about what I'll have to say because I am fallible.

**"...we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies..."
1 Corinthians 8:1b**

James Cook

Important Things to Say

A. Because the scale of approaching this project is so large, even a 30,000' overview is hard to give briefly...but I'll try.

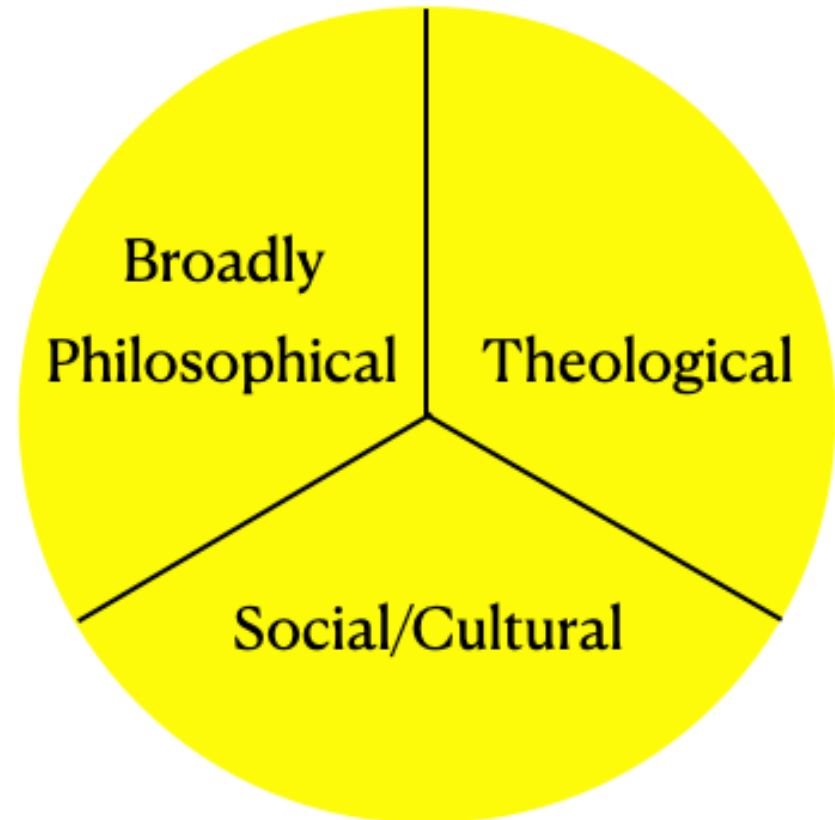
B. Narrowing the field, what I'll actually focus on:

1. Defining a few terms.
2. Why the project of thinking about Christ and academic culture is challenging.
3. Why the project is still worth your time as a Christian who happens to be an academic.
4. ACI resources to aid in the project of developing a view of Christ & academic culture.
5. Focus on one area of academic culture that likely affects your professional work.
6. A few conclusions.

Important Things to Say

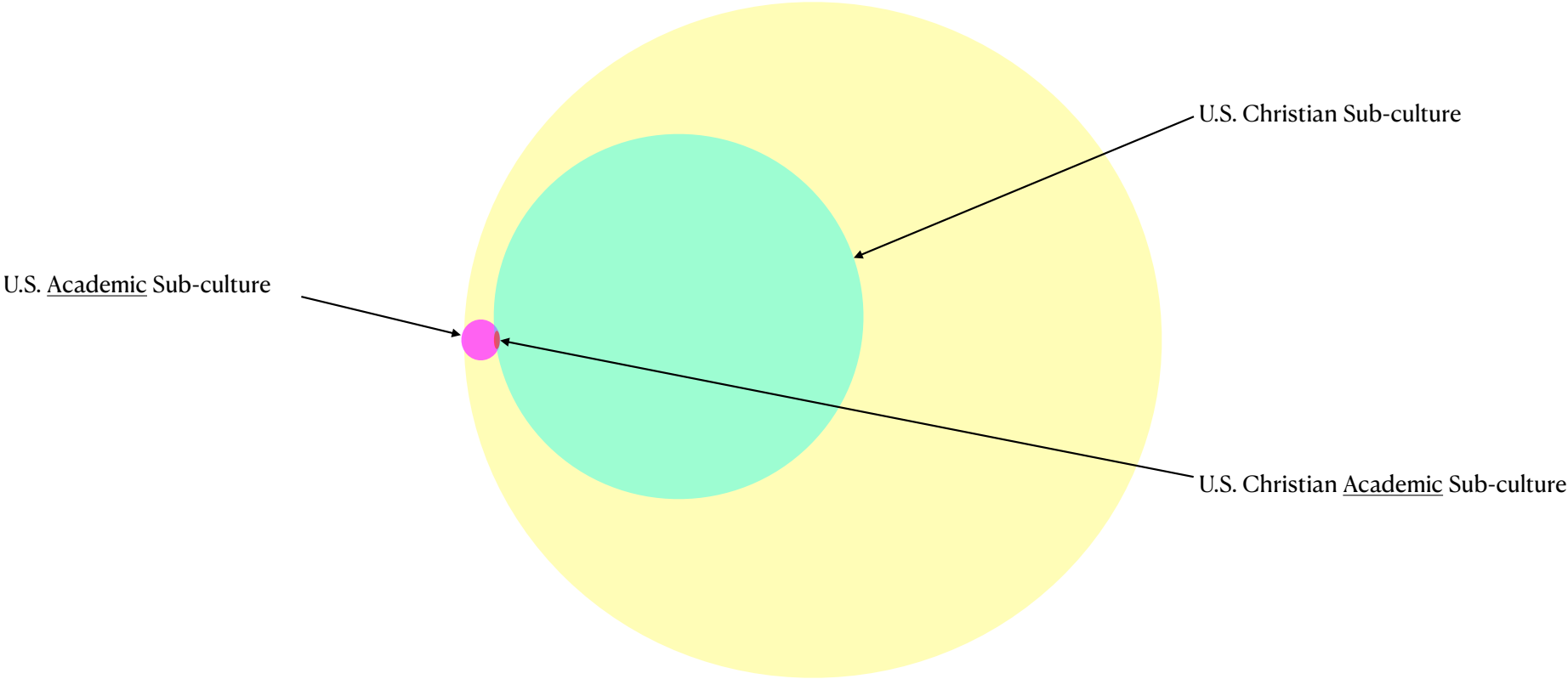
A.

1. Provisionally say there are three big parts: social/cultural, theological, and philosophical



A. 2

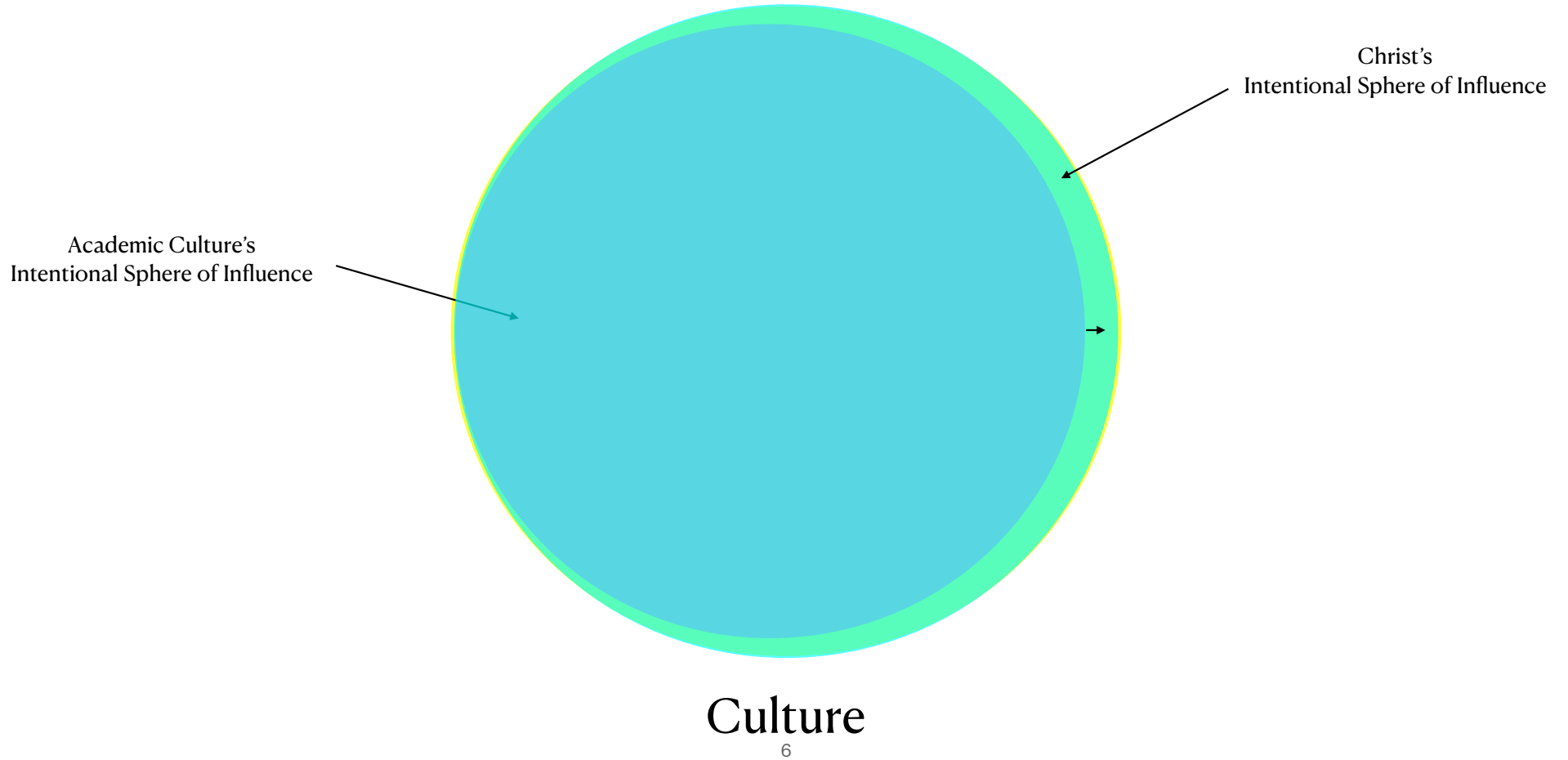
Overview of the Project: Culture & Sub-Cultures



Culture in Terms of Relative Numbers (not to scale)

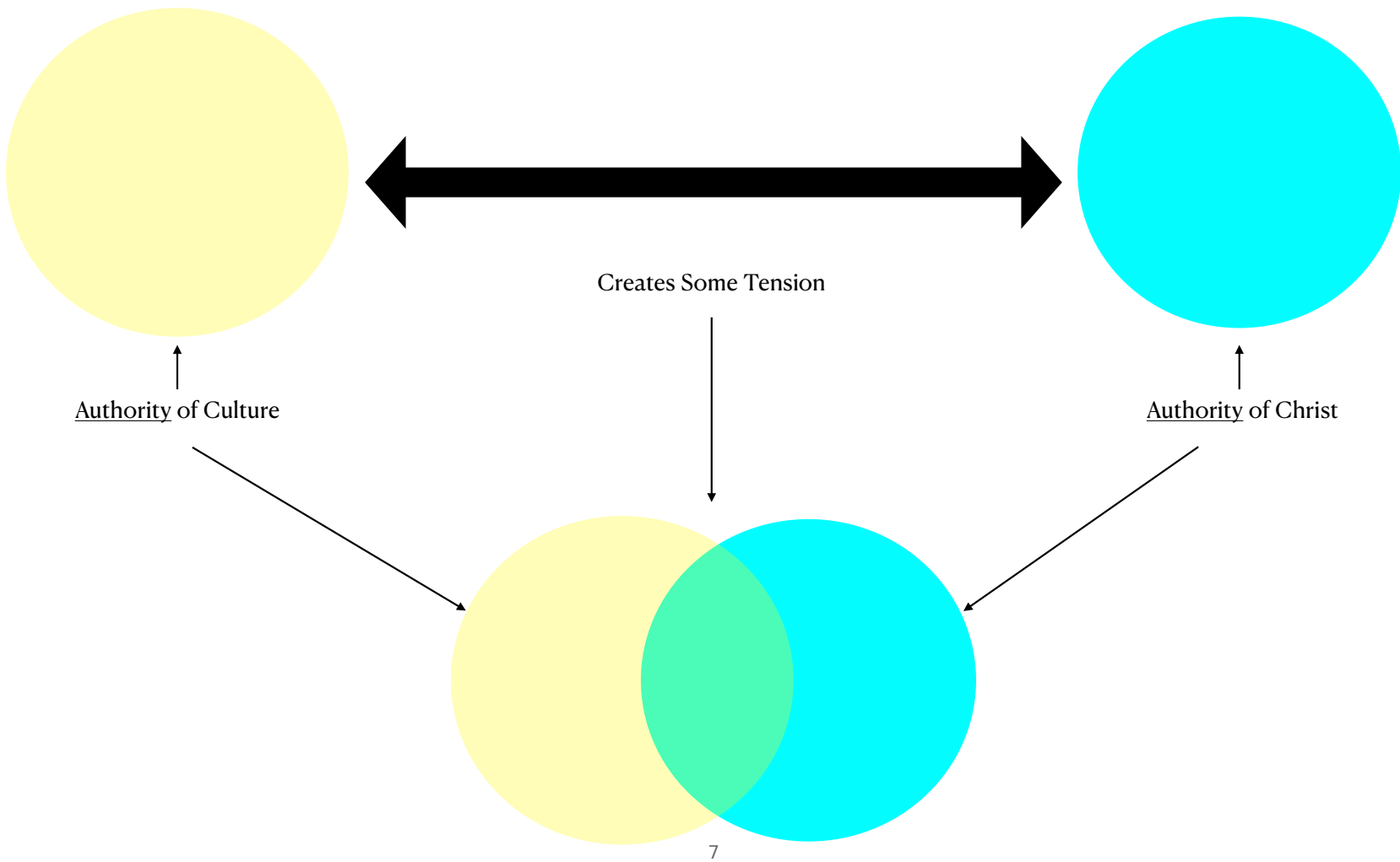
A. 3

The Issue of Spheres of Influence Overlap



A.4

The Issue of Possible Authority Overlap in Academe



A. Sketching a pathway for understanding the Christ and academic culture life-time project, from 30,000'

Start with academic culture as a subset of the larger culture—sociological issues

1. Read & think about the Bible a lot...

Situate your Christ & academic culture project in terms of stewardship



2. Interpretive issues

→ Philosophical in nature
→ Theological in nature



3. Come to an understanding of what exactly is a worldview.



4. Take this seriously for a Christian academic: define a Christian worldview & how it is formed



5. In light of that, provisionally define terms: culture, Christianity, authority, plausibility structure...

6. H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ & Culture*

D.A. Carson's *Christ & Culture Revisited*



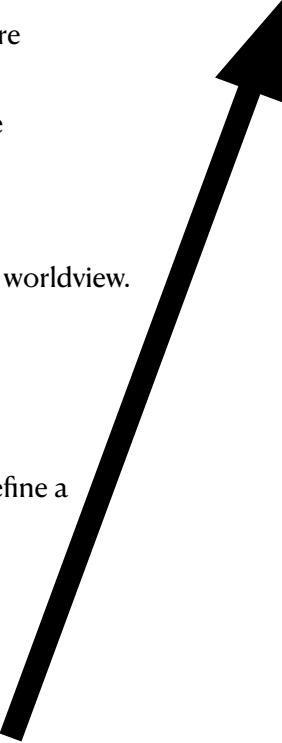
7. Go deeply into the analysis of ideas, the history of ideas and the **sociology** of ideas. What is the difference between "T" truth & truth? What can be "proven", how is evidence evaluated and how are arguments (good & bad) understood?



8. Keep your eye on how the secular intellectual account vs. Christian intellectual accounts differ and how the "authority" dichotomy is understood and handled in the world of ideas. Keep your eye on understanding the nature of Truth and truth!



9. Reach conclusions & take appropriate action



B) 1. Defining Some Terms

As I Will be Using Them

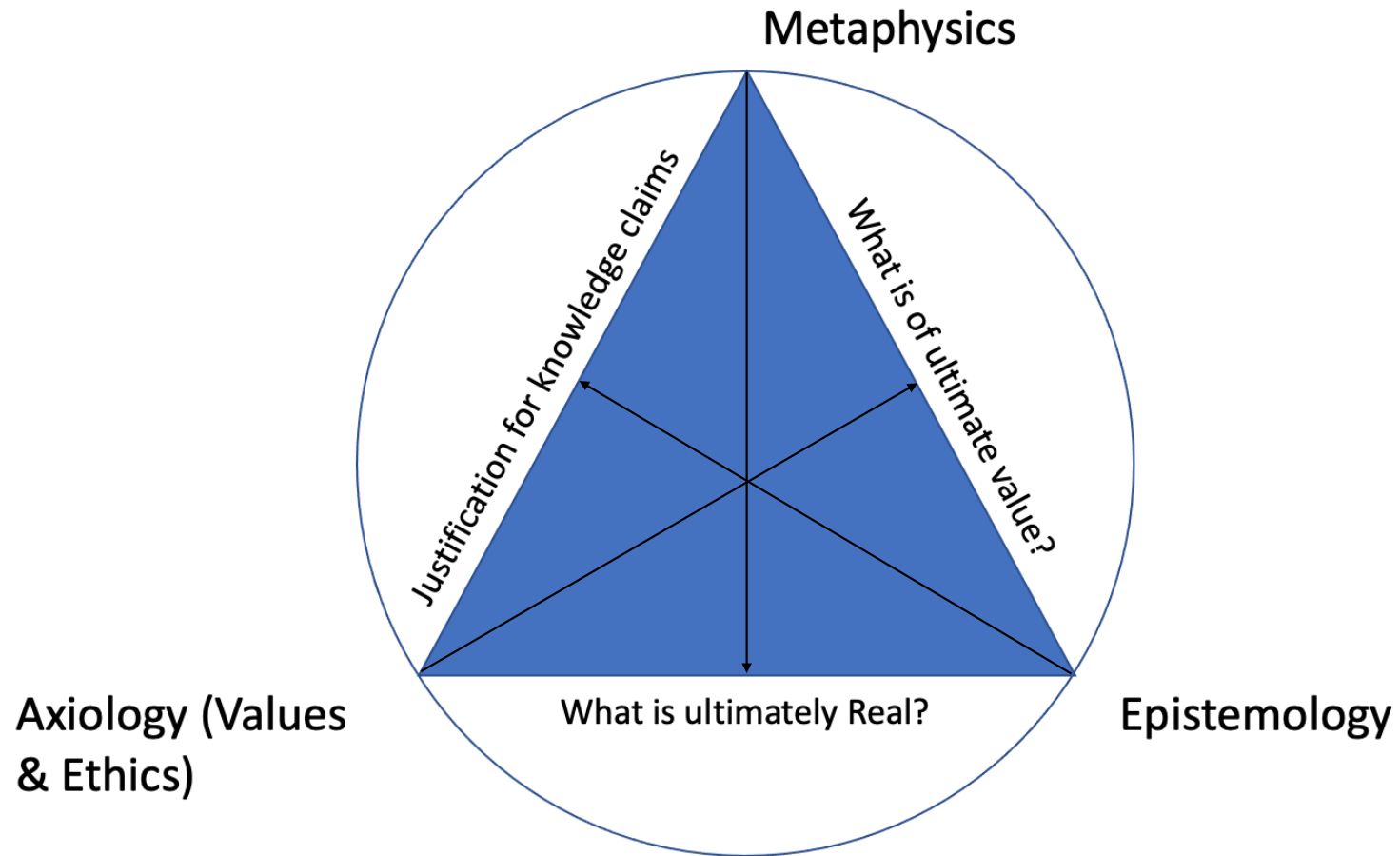
- Christians and Christianity
 - Understand the term Christian is profoundly “connected” to the NT documents.
 - Historical/Theological—followers of Christ
 - Recipients of God’s grace & regenerated in Christ, that is not of works...and in some sense is of works.
 - Vicarious substitutionary atonement...by faith.
- Christian scholarship
 - Scholarship informed by a Christian perspective
 - examples: a Christian view of the nature of science; a Christian view of the mind/body problem; Christianity and the problem of free-will, a Christian view of the academic disciplines...one by one.
 - “I believe in God as I believe in the sun, not just because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”
- Christian academic integration
 - Scholarship informed by Christian perspective—so roughly speaking I’m using the terms synonymously
- Not to be confused with scholarship done by Christians from or informed merely from a secular perspective.

B) 1. Defining Some Terms (cont.)

As I Will Be Using Them

- **Authority of culture**—seen as a spectrum
 - High end—Christian “accepts” everything from academic culture—no critique from a Christian perspective
 - Low end—Christian accepts nothing or very little without critical thinking—everything seen through eyes of Christ, but not all things are perhaps as relevant.
- **Authority of Christ**—
 - High End— “...We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”
 - Low End—Christianity as a whole is an inaccurate account of reality...and therefore to be held, if at all, merely privately. No interaction at all in the public square or market place of ideas.
- **Worldview**
 - Weltanschauung—for an individual or group—a comprehensive & systematic way of **seeing**, understanding & organizing “data”*
 - Different ways of expressing this idea of worldview: 1) through (grand) narrative or stories; 2) attempt to do this with greater verbal or mathematical “rigor”

Credit: diagram suggested by a similar diagram presented in an apologetics course taught by Charles Moore at Denver Seminary

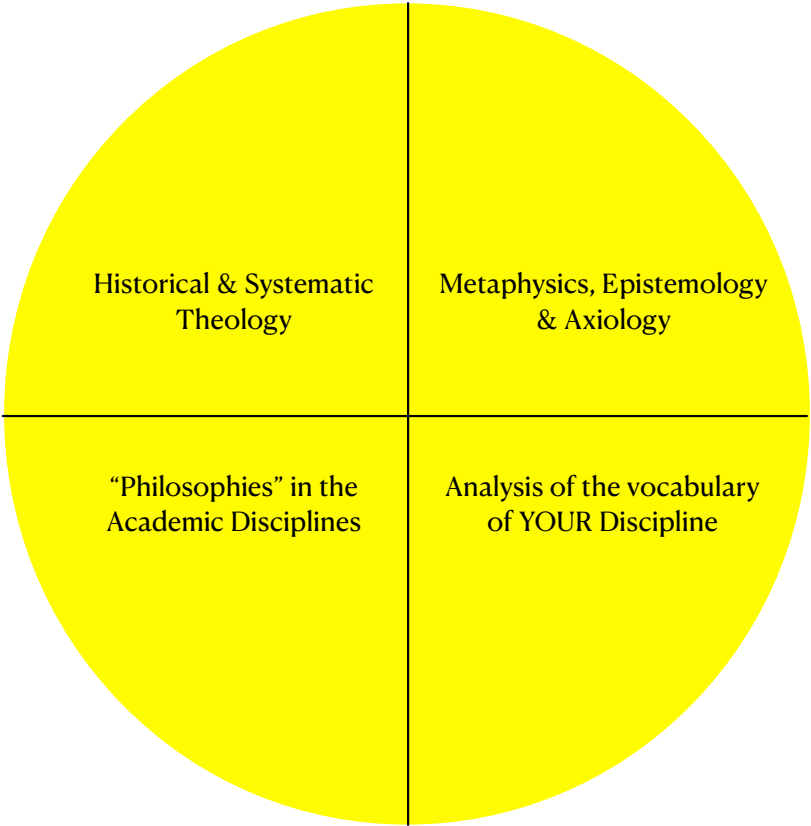


B) 2. Why This Project is so Challenging?

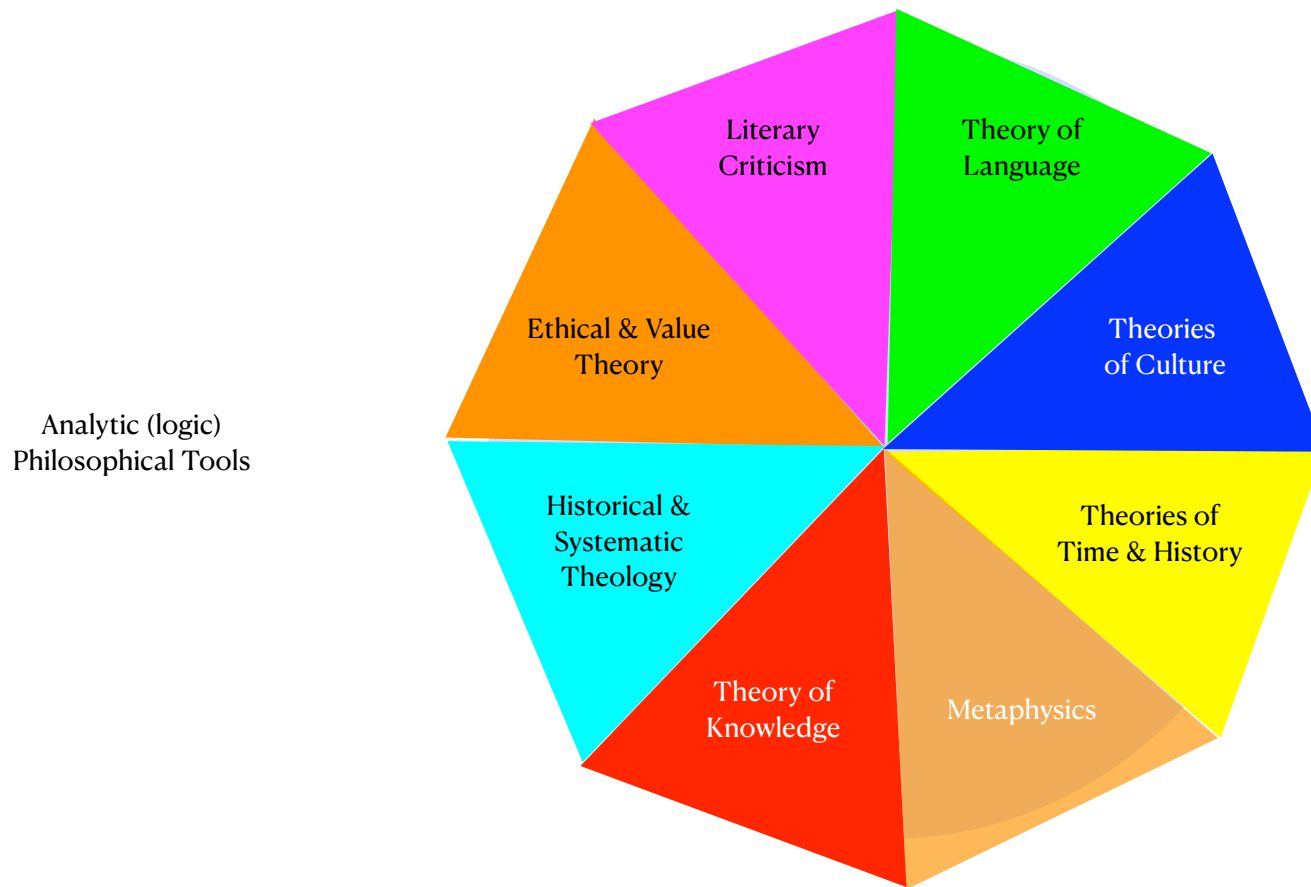
- Understanding Christ and academic culture as an academic involves, at least:
 - A penetrating analysis of historical theology and systematic theology & the philosophical issues “around” theology (historical & interpretive)
 - A penetrating analysis of philosophical domains: metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology (ethics & values) and their histories
 - A penetrating analysis of the various philosophies of the academic disciplines
 - (egs. Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Theology....) & schools of thought within disciplines (egs. structuralism in linguistics, post-structuralism in literature...)
 - And a penetrating analysis of the current state of **your** particular academic discipline—including an understanding of the sociology of ideas.
 - A sophisticated & developed Christian worldview?
- Who among us is up to that?

First Pass on Valued Competencies

Analytic (logic)
Philosophical Tools



Second Pass: Valued Competencies for Understanding Christ and Academic Culture



B) 3. Why it is Still Worth Your Time & Effort

- It provides a sophisticated path for pursuing integrality, and a way to measure the integrity between the life of your mind and the way you live your life.
- Wholeness...completeness...fulfillment. A goal and a process to live a “good life” as a Christian, who is called as (or to be) an academic.
- You are commanded as of first importance to, “...Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and **with all your mind...**” (emphasis mine)
- Fulfill this not merely as obedience, but as a matter of gratitude. A response to grace.

B) 4. ACI Resources for the Project

- ACI Christ & culture resources on our site:
 - Our Home Page: <https://academicconnectionsgcm.org>
 - Our “Faith & Scholarship” portal:
 - <https://www.academicconnectionsgcm.org/other-resources/scholarship/faith-and-scholarship-porta/index.html>
 - Our Christ & culture page:
 - <https://www.academicconnectionsgcm.org/other-resources/scholarship/christ-and-culture-resource/index.html>

B) 5 Quick Take on Some Shifts in (Intellectual/Cultural) Thinking in the West and its impact on academe. (Roughly, the received tradition)

20th century & beyond->Vienna Circle: **Carnap, Hempel**; Frankfurt School & Critical Theory: **Habermas, Marcuse**; Structuralism: **Levi-Strauss**; Hermeneutics & Aesthetics: **Gadamer**; Post-Structuralism, Deconstructionism, Postmodernism: **Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard**; Pragmatism: **Rorty**. What's next? New Emergent Science, Proper Function & Warrant: **Plantinga**; **New Reformation?**

18th century Enlightenment, Rise of Modern (Reductionist) Science & Methodological Naturalism: lasting influence on academe
Hume, Kant, the Philosophers, roots of pragmatism, 19th century: **Hegel, Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche**...God is "dead",
speculation without "myth & narrative", but then the Romantics, moving from Royalty to democracy.

15th & 16th century Renaissance, interest in secular classical literature among intellectuals and the wealthy; rise of Christian humanism & roots of **secular humanism**, beginning of the rise of modern science; 16th century Reformation: rejection of Roman spiritual authority

Medieval Christendom: Carolingian Renaissance; **Aquinas**, Scholasticism, trivium & quadrivium—method for teaching; resurfacing of ancient literature played a role in the breakdown the medieval consensus

Judeo-Christian influence to Fall of Rome: Athens and Jerusalem contrasted Tertullian & Clement of Alexandria, preservation of classical literature (Athens) in monasteries; **Augustine, speculation with "myth" & narrative**

Pre-Socratic and Classical Greek & Roman period: **speculation without superstition**, (2 epistemic strategies rationalism & empiricism introduced); metaphysics: what is real?, is there a difference between perception and reality?, Idealism and Empiricism. Pre-Socratics, **Socrates, Plato, & Aristotle**

Presumed Ignorance & Superstition: (acquisition of language promotes stories/narratives which shape culture); "stories" & "myths" shape culture—**superstition**.

B) 6. Some Conclusions

- Not too much in this presentation is directly on the sociological part...except the diagrams & references.
- By focusing on the history of ideas we can see the result of paradigm shifts in the received tradition in academia that affects culture & your life now
 - Went from pre-written history's superstition to authority of Reason without myths
 - Middle ages tried to synthesize the Christian "narrative/myth" with Reason
 - Renaissance & especially Enlightenment were a strong return to Reason without the guarantees of the Christian "narrative" (eventually leading to the exclusion of objectivity and much more...)
 - Romanticism of the late 19th century can be seen as an escape from Reason, but not a return of the intellectuals to the Christian "myth"
 - Rejection of metaphysics (or made subjective), existentialism and pragmatism growing in the 20th century; Aesthetics and Art as a "new" myth; some hold this new myth as a mix of subjectivity and objectivity. There is serious trouble justifying how they hold that position on secular terms.

Metaphysics



Epistemology



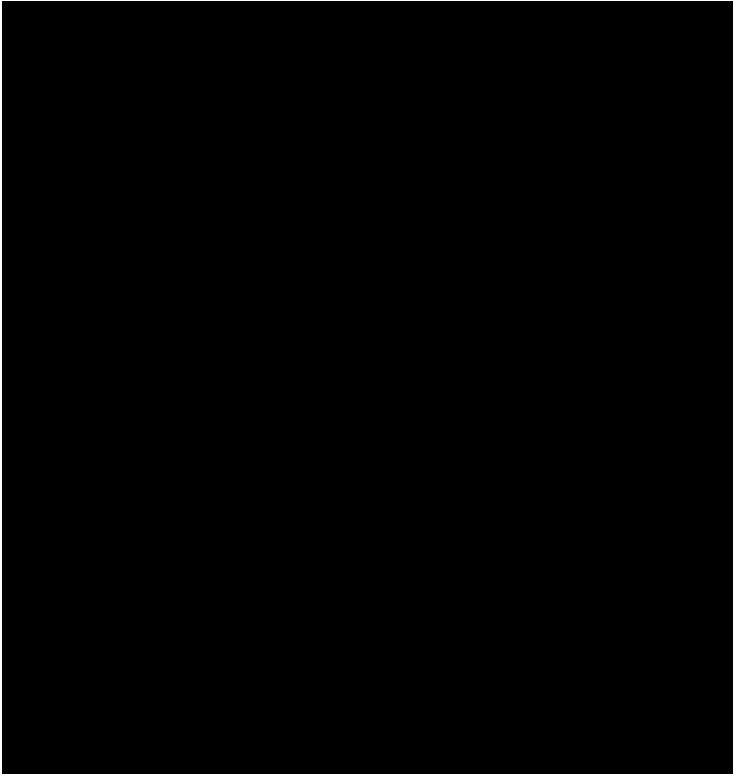
Axiology & Ethics

Person in the Street "Common Sense"	Realist—real physical world, with subjects and objects that exist "out there". No theory of abstract objects or mathematics	Not just a guess; uses common sense and justified true belief; knowing is being sure; accepts expert authority.	There is objective moral rights and wrong, but no theory about it.
Typical Christian in the Street Sunday school education	Realist—real physical world, with subjects and objects that exist "out there". No theory of abstract objects or of mathematics, except vague sense these are hard problems.	Not just a guess; knowing is being sure, will often accept something as knowledge if it came from what they think is an expert authority.	There are objective moral rights and wrongs; and, Scripture & conscience tells us what they are.
Early Science: Galileo	Realist about an external world, mathematical theories try to get at the deep structure of the world "out there."	Discovering the "deep structure" out there. Mathematics seems to explain the world that exists independently of our opinion. We know by experience & reflection.	I don't know, perhaps Scripture & the Church's teaching
Early Science: Newton	Realist about an external world, not a clue as to what the "out there" really is, but mathematics explains how it works well.	Looking for the deep structure "out there." Mathematics seems to explain the world that exists independently of our opinion.	Unknown by me.

Switching to the Present: Getting a Sense of How Worldview Impacts Thinking

- Realist Structuralism:**
1. Metaphysics: Critical Realist
 2. Representation of the data in the mind
 3. Possibility of objectivity (mind independence) as the theories close in on the Truth
 4. Foundational theory of knowledge (deductive **Cartesian**)
 5. Correspondence theory of Truth

- Post-structuralism:**
1. Categories in our mind allow us to have experience (Kantian)
 2. The “interface” (our experience), isn’t the Truth, but it allows us to survive & multiply (evolutionary psychology); **Anti-Realism**, metaphysical constructivism?
 3. Not a representation of an external Reality, just the “ideas” in our mind/brain; the death of “T” truth. Either no deep structure, or we cannot ever know the deep structure. Worse—claiming that sort of knowledge is: imperialistic & oppressive.
 4. Coherency theory of knowledge
 5. Subjectivity: leads to nihilism, counter-intuitively to: humanism or Machiavellianism; **Hoffman**



Data (presumably “out there” and with deep structure to be discovered)

Realist Structuralism (discovering the deep structure in the data)

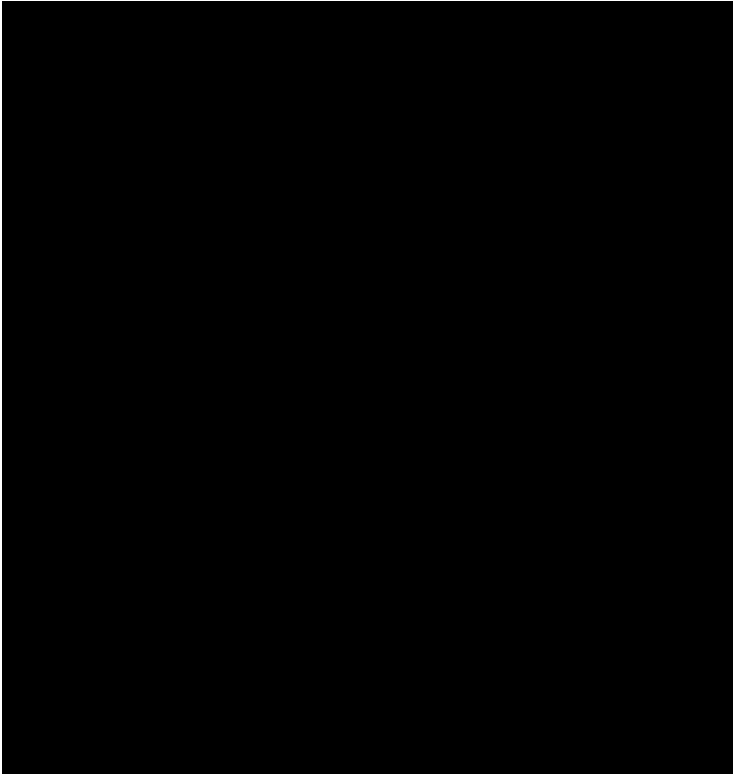
Post-structuralism (mind constructing “whatever structure” with no means to compare it to the Truth)

Pragmatic or Instrumentalist Realist

- 1. Nuanced degree hybrids in Worldview categories
- 2. Metaphysics: Critical Realist, Non-Constructivism, yet finds it hard to define things like what is motion or what is physical?
- 3. Epistemology: Instrumentalist (alleged of Newton), Coherency Theory; Linguistics. e.g. **Chomsky**, emphasis on innate knowledge, cites progress of science, promotes tolerance and wants to be a non-relativists but has problems with justification.

Pragmatic or Instrumentalist Realist2*

- 1. Nuanced degree hybrid in Worldview categories
- 2. Metaphysics: Realist because he “discerns” objectivity epistemically; finds it hard to define things like what is motion or what is physical?
- 3. Epistemology: key is that aesthetics teaches there is subjectivity and objectivity in our knowledge; rejects relativism in many important areas, promotes tolerance, e.g. **Gadamer**



Data (presumably “out there”, with a deep structure to be discovered)

B1. Some Conclusions (con't)

- Last two Realist examples, they didn't seem to want to realize that the return to Reason on secular terms (that is, demanding proof) would lead "us" back to radical skepticism and subjectivity! Back to metaphysical skepticism and epistemic pragmatism—no longer can have correspondence of our ideas to reality (Truth), rather at best have increasing coherence of ideas—truth is what works.
- What follows from the anti-realist position, post-structuralism, perspectivism, are "regimes of truth" which seem to capture the linguistic turn in philosophy. Also, the Kuhnian paradigms in science, but not discovering deep structure "out there."
 - Despite the protest from the New Aesthetics, we're moving back to raw power & propaganda being the key in the spirit of individual and cultural nihilism, **hard and soft cudgel power**, examples: Homer, Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Marx, the Frankfurt School, and Foucault; intolerance.
 - Counterintuitively, we're in both a nihilistic age which annihilates all Truth and would support "hard" power to get what it wants, and a sort of a secular humanist age "myth" that uses "soft" power—with its exaltation of humanity, ambivalence toward heroic individuals & cultures, emphasis making the here and now "better," intolerance of Christian values, but still uses power to overcome those who disagree with their aesthetics and sensibilities.
- This "state of affairs" is the current academic culture "with whom we have to do" in that world; we have some important things to discern and to say as Christian academics. This should be further explored, therefore explore on!!

END

Handout for presentation:

<https://www.academicconnectionsgcm.org/articles---research--specia/pdfs/intro-handout.pdf>