Apologetics

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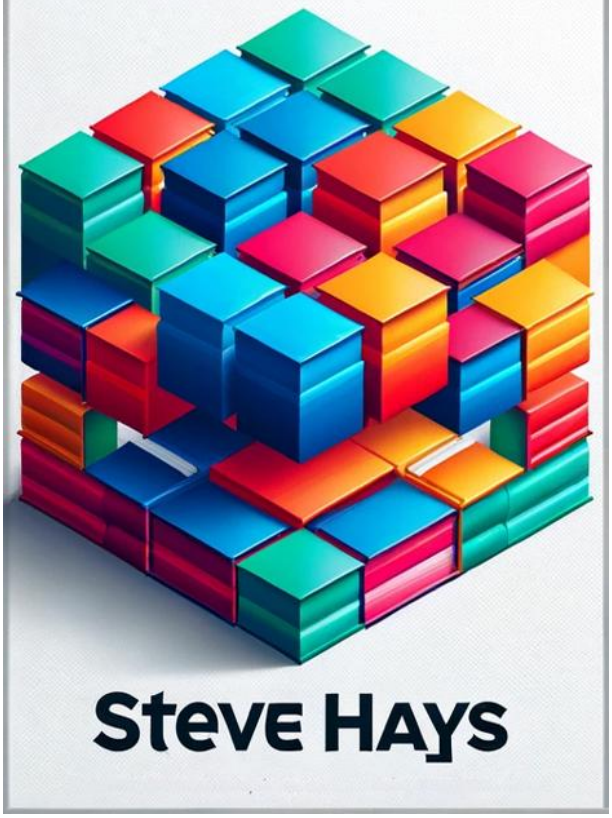

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Tips on apologetics

Christian apologetics is primarily the purview of bachelors. Once they have to juggle wife, kids, and full-time job, they no longer have the same leisure time for apologetics.

I've been doing apologetics for many years, and it isn't possible to have an intelligent, constructive dialogue with some people. So I simply avoid arguing with certain kinds of people.

1. Hobbyhorses

Some people have a hobbyhorse like creationism or cessationism or a millennial position or even geocentrism. In their eyes, you can be right about everything else, but if you're wrong on that particular issue, that nullifies everything else you believe. They're obsessed with their hobbyhorse. That's their litmus test. That's all they want to talk about. And if you let them, they will make their hobbyhorse your hobbyhorse.

Life is short. You have to pick your fights. You need to have your own priorities.

2. Convince me!

There are unbelievers who imagine Christians have a duty to convince them. I don't. I have a duty to give you my reasons for what I believe and respond to objections. That's where my duty begins and ends. I'm not responsible for what you believe. That's on you. I really don't care what you do with your life, especially if you live in willful disbelief. If you're just uninformed, I'm happy to correct that.

3. Illuminati

Many laymen believe the Holy Spirit is their teacher. He gives you the correct interpretation of Scripture. The Bible doesn't actually promise that. It's folk theology. But it's impossible to have a reasonable debate with someone like that. They view themselves as God's oracle. To disagree with them is to disagree with God.

4. Onion peelers

Some unbelievers have faulty assumptions that go layers deep. Every time you correct or clarify one of their faulty assumptions, there's another layer underneath. It's just too time-consuming to peel back all the layers. And they're usually not listening anyway. Don't invest time in people who are a waste of time.

5. Self-selected consensus

Some unbelievers appeal to consensus. It's a self-selected consensus where they preemptively disqualify anyone who doesn't think alike. For instance, you're not a real Bible scholar unless you're committed to methodological atheism. It's not possible to have a rational discussion with someone who appeals to a circular standard of consensus.

6. Loaded questions

There are unbelievers who ask loaded questions. Questions that beg the question by framing the issue in prejudicial ways. That build contested assumptions into the formulation of the question. Often they don't even recognize that they are asking loaded questions. If you refuse to answer their loaded question, they think you're being evasive. But the proper response to a loaded question is not to answer the

question but to challenge the question. Point out that the question assumes the very thing that needs to be proven.

7. Foils

In public debate, the objective isn't generally to persuade your opponent. However, some people are worth debating because they are good spokesmen for the other side. You debate them, not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of lurkers.

8. Burden of proof

Some disputants fail to appreciate that both sides have a burden of proof. They imagine that you only have a burden of proof if you affirm or assert something. But that's a fallacy. To deny something is also a truth claim. Likewise, to be noncommittal is to say the evidence is insufficient.

9. Spoonfeeders

Some unbelievers say there's no evidence for God or the Bible or miracles. The Bible is full of contradictions, scientific and historical blunders. The problem of evil sinks Christianity. OT ethics is abhorrent. And so on and so forth.

When you point them to accessible resources to consult, they refuse to study the resources. They demand that you spoonfeed them examples and arguments. But it can't mean more to you than it does to them. If they refuse to do the most elementary research, if they refuse to study the evidence when you refer them to good resources, then you've done your job. You're not responsible for their intellectual frivolity.

10. Moving the goal post.

Some unbelievers will raise an objection. When they lose the argument, they simply change the subject. They raise a new objection. So it's unclear what their real reasons are for their disbelief. The reasons they give don't seem to be their real reasons because it makes no difference to their position when the reason they give is debunked. They just keep moving the goal post.

11. What's your best argument for Christianity?

Some unbelievers demand that you provide your best argument for Christianity. But that's simplistic. That assumes there's one best argument for Christianity. But there are many good arguments for Christianity. Many independent lines of evidence for Christianity. And some people find certain kinds of evidence more appealing than others, viz. historical, philosophical, scientific, personal religious experience. Christianity would be apologetically impoverished if the case for Christianity was reducible to one best argument.

12. Give me your best example of miracle

By the same token, some atheists demand that you provide your best example of a miracle. But that assumes there is one best example. Yet that's unreasonable. The argument from miracles is a cumulative case argument. A collection of well-documented case-studies. That allows for a margin for error. The argument doesn't rise or fall on one particular example but a wide-range of credible reports.

13. Hypotheticals

Some unbelievers evade the actual evidence by raising hypothetical objections to Christianity. Hypothetical

defeaters or undercutters. How can you be certain?

14. Psychology

Some unbelievers focus on the psychology of faith. What are your motives to be a Christian rather than what are your reasons to be a Christian?

15. Personal testimony

Some unbelievers demand that you give personal examples. While there can be a place for that, it's only as credible as the witness. An advantage of public testimony is that it may include corroborative evidence.

16. Anecdotal evidence

By contrast, some unbelievers automatically discount anecdotal evidence. But while it may be fallacious to generalize from anecdotal evidence, anecdotal evidence can be perfectly legitimate to establish that certain kinds of things happen or exist. You just can't extrapolate beyond the sample.

17. Dictionary fallacy

There are people who imagine you can resolve a philosophical dispute by consulting a dictionary definition. One problem with that appeal is that dictionaries simply describe popular usage. In addition, many philosophical debates use technical jargon. The words have a more specialized meaning. And it's about more than the meaning of words. It's about intricate concepts. Even at that level of analysis, an encyclopedia of philosophy doesn't tell the reader which position is right.

18. Pseudointellectuals

Many critics who are not intellectuals raise intellectual objections to Christianity, or Calvinism, or the Trinity and the Incarnation, or the Protestant faith. Although they raise intellectual objections, they lack the aptitude to understand an intellectual explanation. They raise a philosophical objection, but they can't follow the explanation. It sails over their heads.

So they're not listening. They tune out the explanation. They just wait for you to stop talking, then launch into their flashcard objections.

On a related note, some people are able to grasp the explanation if they gave themselves a chance, but they don't think you have anything worthwhile to say. You must be wrong. So if you present a sophisticated explanation, they screen that out. They dismiss that as a snowjob. You're just trying to hoodwink them with a blizzard of evasive technicalities. They're too suspicious to think you could possibly be right. So they don't seriously consider what you have to say. Even though they raise rational objections, they lack the rational patience to process and assess the answer.

19. Authority-mongers

Many Catholics reduce every issue to authority. By what authority do you justify the Protestant canon? By what authority to you justify your interpretation of Scripture. It never dawns on them that the appeal to religious authority is regressive. At some stage in the process they must fall back on their fallible personal judgment.

20. Low standards

Many people get their arguments from lightweight popularizers. They don't study the best their own side has to offer. For instance, they imagine that Leighton Flowers is a competent critic of Calvinism and competent exponent of freewill theism. They don't study serious Bible scholars on their own side like I. H. Marshalll or Brian Abasciano. They don't study philosophers of libertarian freedom like Robert Kane of Kevin Timpe. They don't study philosophical freewill theologians like Alvin Plantinga, Alexander Pruss, Peter van Inwagen, or Richard Swinburne. And they don't study the best the opposing side has to offer, in terms of exegetical or philosophical theology, viz. Don Carson, Ramsey Michaels on John's Gospel, Tom Schreiner on Romans, Steven Baugh on Ephesians, P. T. O'Brien on Hebrews, Karen Jobes on 1-3 John, Greg Beale on Revelation; Paul Helm, James Anderson, Greg Welty, Paul Manata, and Guillaume Bignon on philosophical objections to Calvinism.

A parallel example is Catholics who get their information, not from reading Catholic academics, Bible scholars, and church historians, but outfits like Catholic Answers.

Likewise, many atheists get their arguments from hack atheists.

"Thomistic Simplicism"

I'm going to comment on this post:

https://philosophyandtheism.wordpress.com/author/nateshannon/

I'll begin with two general observations:

i) A basic problem with Oliphant and Shannon is how they seem to be saying more than they really are. They are writing words. Words which denote ideas. They put certain words together, which makes it look like they are putting certain ideas together. Combining ideas with other ideas.

But they aren't showing how the ideas go together. They aren't showing how these concepts are logically interrelated. At most, they assert that this idea is related to that idea.

So it's combining words with other words, words which denote ideas, as if that explains anything. The words are doing the work of logic. The discussion stays at a verbal surface level. They are saying far less than they appear to be, to the casual reader. We see words on a page, words connected to other words, as if that connects ideas to other ideas. But the performance is illusory.

ii) Another problem: in his post he keeps claiming that Helm's position (i.e. God is unaffected by the world) is grounded in Thomistic simplicity. However:

i) He doesn't quote Helm making that connection.

ii) He doesn't show how that follows from Thomistic simplicity.

iii) The denial that God is affected by the world doesn't presuppose Thomistic simplicity. One can hold that on other grounds.

Moving along:

On the one hand:

> Metaphysical simplicism renders all biblical teaching about God 'metaphorical', at best, or "not literally true," says Helm: "On the theory of divine accommodation, statements such as 'God repented' are in a sense false, false if taken literally.

On the other hand:

> Oliphint acknowledges that speaking of God's essence requires that we speak apophatically, but he affirms a notion of analogy which allows us to speak theologically after the pattern of God's own trustworthy speech about himself. That is, Scripture affords true knowledge of God as he is in himself, even given creaturely epistemic limitations. "We can affirm that of which we cannot conceive"

i) But if we can only speak of God's essence apophatically, then isn't "God repented" literally false?

ii) Notice how Shannon goes straight from apophaticism to analogy, as if those are compatible concepts. But doesn't analogy requires some degree of positive knowledge?

iii) No, we can't affirm what we can't conceive. We can affirm what we *partially* conceive.

> And so Helm describes a dichotomy between eternal decree and historical event. “In short what God timelessly decrees is a complete causal matrix of events and actions” (Eternal God, 170). In his post he writes, “[b]iblical theism requires that we make a sharp distinction between what God has eternally decreed, and what as a result comes to pass moment by moment, stage by stage in time. Otherwise we confound the Creator with his creation. The coming to pass of what is eternally decreed is executed in time. But God is not in time, though what he decrees to come to pass most certainly is.”

i) I'd say that's a distinction, not a "dichotomy." Those are not in tension.

ii) What's wrong with Helm's formulation?

> God decrees eternally; and we see this as God acting temporally.

That's because we're on the receiving end of the transaction. We experience the effect.

> Following Thomas, Helm claims that God eternally decrees historical event E, and therefore we do not say that historical event E affects God in any way or implies the historicity of divine activity.

i) That's because an effect cannot affect its cause. Otherwise, you have retrocausation.

ii) I don't know what he even means by the "historicity of divine activity." Frankly, I doubt he knows what he means by that.

iii) Although the relation between the decree and the outcome goes in one direction, we can infer the decree from the outcome. The order of knowledge can reverse the order of being. Shannon fails to distinguish between ontological priority and epistemological priority.

> This is an obvious non-sequitur which gently overlooks the entire economy of salvation, as a result of which Helm denies a historical transition from wrath to grace.

i) Well, you could have a *historical* transition from wrath to grace, in terms of how sinners experience God's wrath and grace. Take a transition from an unregenerate to a regenerate state.

What you can't have is an *eternal* transition from wrath to grace.

ii) The "entire economy of salvation" is the *result* of God's decree. So, no, that's not reversible.

Retreating into pious nonsense

I'll comment on this post:

https://philosophyandtheism.wordpress.com/2014/07/08/god-in-time-yes-temporal-god-no/

God is in time because there is no time unless God is in it.

Unfortunately, Shannon gives the reader no reason to agree with that claim, on its own terms. It's just a tendentious slogan.

At best, he shifts gears to a different argument:

> That’s a little Vos-Van Til talk, but we could infer the same from omnipresence and eternity. Eternity does not mean that God as God cannot touch temporality (again, unless you are entangled in Thomistic simplicism; but then you have created your own problems). It means that he fills all time, just as omnipresence doesn’t mean that God cannot be in places (spatially located); it means that he fills all places. This is an unbiblical non sequitur: He fills all time, therefore he cannot be in time. So is this: He fills all space, therefore he cannot be in a place.

It doesn't even occur to Shannon that his comparison might backfire: just as omnipresence doesn't mean God literally fills space, eternity doesn't mean God literally fills time. Shannon doesn't anticipate that move, or give the reader reason to deny it.

> So if we affirm, say, omnipresence, what then is condescension (which the divines worked into the confession—WCF 7.1)? If God fills all space, what does it mean that he ‘comes down’? To where does he come

> down? Well, to the top of Mt. Sinai (Ex 19), for example—even though being omnipresent, he was already there. He 'comes down' to covenant with Israel. Mt. Sinai is a particular place; and Ex 19 records the Lord's presence there at a particular time. And so: if God fills all time, we may say that he condescends in order to covenant with his people at Mt. Sinai, at that time. The Lord speaks to Moses, then and there.

That's a theophany or angelophany. A *manifestation* of God's presence. A manifestation is the *effect* of something else, and not the thing itself.

Take a hologram. I could see and hear your holographic presence in my living room, but that doesn't mean you are physically present in my living room. It's a concrete *representation*.

In principle, I might be dead by the time you receive the hologram. In that event, not only am I not actually in your living room, I'm not even offsite.

> And this presence of God with his people is no innovation; it is the telos of covenant history:
>
> > **"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." Rev 21:3**

That presumably alludes to Christ dwelling with his people. That involves the communication of attributes. The usual Reformed construction is that what's said of each nature can be said of the person, but what's said of one nature can't be said of the other.

Parsons on presuppositionalism

Over at the Secular Outpost, Keith Parsons has some observations about transcendental theism:

http://www.patheos.com/blogs/secularoutpost/2015/06/08/link-the-jones-parsons-martin-exchange-1991/

> **Keith Parsons** It seems to me that the CP project is like Descartes's in Meditations on First Philosophy. You raise the specter of total skepticism and seek a secure foundation for knowledge. By the end of Meditation II, Descartes only knows three things for sure--that he exist, that he is a thinking thing, and that whatever he perceives "clearly and distinctly" must be so. To safeguard knowledge from the Evil Demon, Descartes must prove that a good God exists, and this he sets out (fallaciously) to do in Meditation III.
> The difference between the CPer and Descartes is that the latter seeks to prove God's existence, while the former presupposes it. However, some knowledge is required even to coherently presuppose. The Christian God must be assumed to be the sort of being that values truth and rationality. CPers therefore have to trust that their assumptions about the putative nature of the Christian God are (a) intelligible, and (b) true. Any attempt to demonstrate the intelligibility or truth of their assumption could not rest on that assumption, upon pain of circularity. Hence, any non-circular attempted demonstration of the intelligibility or truth of the assumption would violate the assumption itself by appealing to standards not validated by the Christian God.
> The upshot is that we have no choice. If we want to

> know anything at all, at some point we have to accept the deliverances of our own reason.

The comparison with Descartes is interesting, but misses the point:

i) Descartes is questioning what we take for granted. If we systematically scrutinize what we take for granted, how much of that is indubitable?

ii) Transcendental theism is similar, but different. The question at issue is how we can ground what we take for granted. Indeed, what we *must* take for granted. If we deny the existence of God, then do many of the fundamental beliefs we take for granted become groundless? Once you deny God's existence, that commits you do denying all the implicated beliefs. It's not a question of indubitable belief, but the metaphysical basis, if any, for the fundamental beliefs we take for granted.

iii) Parsons is blending transcendental theism with a strategy to deflect the Cartesian demon. But a God who values truth and rationality is not, in the instance, the distinctive contention of transcendental theism. Rather, it's about the possibility of knowledge. What metaphysical machinery is required for truth and rationality to even exist.

iv) You can indirectly demonstrate the necessity of the claim. You explicate the claim to demonstrate that there's no rational alternative.

v) To counter that believers and unbelievers alike have no alternative to reliance on reason misses the point: transcendental theism doesn't deny that. The question at

issue is what, if anything, undergirds that dependence. Conversely, does atheism subvert the reliability of reason? Examples include the argument from reason (C. S. Lewis, Victor Reppert) and Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism.

Sure, there's a sense in which reason is the inescapable starting-point. But an acidhead who's tripping out on LSD must still rely reason, even though his faculties are woefully impaired.

> What makes Modus Ponens valid? That is, how can we be sure that given p -> q and p, q must be true? Put more precisely, how do we know that p -> q and p jointly entail q? This is the same as asking how we know that {[(p -> q) & p] & ~q} is a contradiction. Well, we could write out a truth table showing that for every possible assignment of truth values to p and q, this expression comes out false. That is, {[(p -> q) & p] & ~q} is false on every interpretation, and this is what we mean by a contradiction. But what we get from our proof table is determined by what we put into it. We decide that every proposition has one and only one truth value, T or F, and we define the logical connectives "&" and "->" and "~" in certain rigorous ways. In other words WE make the rules that make arguments valid. There is nothing mysterious, transcendent, or supernatural about it. Achieving valid inference in logic is like achieving checkmate in chess. It often takes some cleverness to get there, but each proof, and each checkmate, is achieved in a rigorously rule-bound way.

Once again, that misses the point:

i) The question at issue isn't what makes modus ponens valid, but the ontology of logic. What *are* logical truths? Is modus ponens something we *invent*, or something we *discover*? Are logical truths necessary and universal? If so, what metaphysical machinery must be in place to make it so?

ii) Do we merely stipulate validity and invalidity, or must our rules correspond to modal intuitions? And must our modal intuitions correspond an ultimate and underlying reality that's independent of human cognition?

Frame's presuppositionalism

I'm going to comment on part of this:

http://ecalvinbeisner.com/freearticles/ClassPresup.pdf

In general, Beisner's analysis suffers from the hermeneutic of suspicion. He is so hostile to Van Tilian apologetics that he always assumes the worst interpretation of Frame's statement.

> One wonders why Frame capitulates to epistemological relativism with the qualifier "*for Christians,* faith governs reasoning." Does faith not govern reasoning for non-Christians? Or, is it true for Christians that faith governs everyone's reasoning, but not true for non-Christians? Certainly Frame believes neither of these. Yet his statement implies one or the other. But presumably this is to be explained as a careless expression.

I take Frame to mean Christians acknowledge the authority of revelation whereas unbelievers do not. For Christians, revelation consciously governs their reasoning, whereas unbelievers consciously reject revelation, or they are simply ignorant of revelation.

> Frame has an aggravating habit of qualifying what he says but not defining the qualifiers. For instance, he writes over and over again (not only in this essay but also elsewhere) of "human reason" and "human logic"– a habit that he shares with Van Til. "The content of faith, Scripture," Frame tells us, "may transcend reason in these two senses: (1) it cannot be proved by *human reason* alone; (2) it contains mysteries, even apparent

> contradictions, that cannot be fully resolved by *human logic*. . . .”20 But what purpose does that modifier, *human*, serve in these statements? Is there some other reason or logic that is not human? Perhaps Frame means not reason or logic in the abstract but the attempt at reasoning by particular persons–though if that is what he means, we might plead with him to say so. But what is reason or logic other than the way God’s mind thinks? The logic humans use includes the law of contradiction; does Frame have in mind some logic that excludes it, a logic that he would describe as “nonhuman logic”? Would that even be logic? Until Frame specifies the axioms of a nonhuman logic, or of a nonhuman reason, his qualifying *reason* and *logic* with *human* is meaningless.

Yes, there *is* some other reason that is not human. For instance, there is angelic reason. More to the point, there's divine reason. God's reason is timeless, infinite, and infallible. Man's reason is temporal, finite, and fallible.

Likewise, there's a difference between "the way God's mind thinks" and human systems of logic. Human systems of logic reflect the human understanding of logic, and that evolves. Consider developments in logic in the 19C and 20C.

Does Beisner believe Skolem's Paradox is the way God's mind thinks?

I suspect Beisner's antipathy to Frame's distinctions and qualifications goes back to the Clark Controversy. Is it possible for the human understanding of logic to correspond to God's understanding of logic to a degree sufficient that

human's can distinguish truth from falsehood? I guess that's what Beisner is getting at. He thinks distinguishing human reason or human logic from divine reason results in skepticism. That may be a legitimate objection to how Van Til formulated his opposition to Clark. However, Beisner is not getting that from Frame's statement.

> Consider Frame's statement that "[We] should present the biblical God, not merely as the conclusion to an argument, but as the one who makes argument possible." The apodosis (second half) of the sentence is not properly parallel to the protasis (first half). After reading that we should present God not merely as the conclusion to an argument, we expect to read that we should present Him as the axiom (starting point) of an argument. That is, the first clause focuses on the *parts* of an argument, not the *conditions* for one. But Frame tacitly turns from the parts of an argument to a statement about the conditions under which argument can occur. God is not merely the conclusion of an argument, but "the one who makes argument possible." Now of course the classical or evidential or cumulative case apologist will agree that had God not existed, or had God existed but never created anything, or had God created only nonrational things or only rational things that never erred, no argument could have taken place (unless of course God argued with Himself–in which case the god that existed would not be the God of the Bible). But that is surely not the point Frame wants to make…we might also wonder why, instead of writing the nonparallel sentence "[We] should present the biblical God, not merely as the conclusion to an argument, but as the one who makes argument possible" Frame did not write, "We should present the biblical God, not merely as the conclusion

> to an argument, but as the major premise as well." That would balance protasis and apodosis, and it would be precisely what Frame believes. It would be unfair to assume that Frame avoided that clarity because it made the absurdity of his position too obvious, but it is not unfair to notice that the imprecision has the effect of hiding the position's absurdity, regardless of intent.

I think Beisner misses Frame's point. Frame isn't trying to create a symmetry between the protasis and the apodosis. Rather, he's making the deeper point that if God didn't exist, there'd be no basis for rational argumentation in the first place. God is the source of human rationality. God is the source of necessary truths as well as contingent truths. God's nature is the foundation of logic. This would stand in contrast, to, say, secular Platonic realism.

> It is precisely these challenges that apologetics must answer, and merely reasserting the opposite is no answer, it is again a *petitio principi*, an argument in a circle. There are more logic problems in them, but my primary purpose in citing these paragraphs was to point out the ambiguity of Frame's conceding that "There is a kind of circularity here, but the circularity is not vicious." The careless reader might think that Frame then goes on to define the "kind of circularity" he has in mind. But aside from denying that it is vicious (that is, that it is logically fallacious)–in which he is simply mistaken–Frame never does say what this "kind of circularity" actually is or how an argument *can* be circular but not vicious. He descends to the same ambiguity when he writes, as I cited once already, "But are we not still forced to say, 'God exists (presupposition), therefore God exists (conclusion),' and isn't that argument clearly circular? Yes, *in a way*.

> But that is unavoidable for any system, any worldview" and "One cannot argue for an ultimate standard by appealing to a different standard. That would be inconsistent. [para] So there is a kind of circle here. But even this circle, as I indicated earlier, is linear in a sense."

i) To begin with, there's a sense in which circular reasoning is a necessary condition of a valid argument. To be valid, the conclusion must be implicit or contained in the premises.

ii) Likewise, there's a sense in which many sound arguments beg the question. That's because a sound argument presumes the truth of the premises. A sound argument is not an argument for the truth of the premises, but for the truth of the conclusion. It takes the truth of the premises for granted. That's an unproven presupposition of the syllogism. In that respect, a sound argument assumes what it needs to prove. *Given* the truth of the premises, the conclusion is true–but unless you grant the truth of the premise, to claim the argument is sound begs the question.

iii) So what makes some arguments viciously circular and other arguments virtuously circular? There are at least two possible considerations:

a) If the truth of the premise is not in dispute, then the argument doesn't beg the question. Keep in mind that's person-variable.

b) In a deductive syllogism, the premises are reasons in support of the conclusion. They are intended to warrant the conclusion. So there's supposed to be some logical progression from premises to conclusion. If, however, the

conclusion is essentially a restatement of the premises, then all it's done is to reassert the same claim. A disguised, repeated, unjustified assertion.

iv) Truth claims are ultimately circular. An appeal to reason presumes the reliability of reason. An appeal to memory presumes the reliability of memory. An appeal to testimony presumes the reliability of testimony. An appeal to observation presumes the reliability of observation. An appeal to Scripture presumes the reliability of Scripture.

Circular reasoning in that sense doesn't ipso facto mean the appeal is arbitrary. These may be necessary preconditions of knowledge. The alternative is global skepticism–which is self-refuting. Mind you, that, in itself, is a tacit appeal to reason.

Apologetic methodology revisited

I. For several reasons, I don't normally discuss apologetic methodology. I think it's often a cul-de-sac. Both sides repeat their talking points. Round and round. There's no progress. It's often a substitute for doing apologetics. In particular, presuppositionalists have a bad habit of never getting around to doing apologetics. To their credit, evidentialists produce a lot more apologetics. Finally, I have my own apologetic philosophy. I don't normally talk about it because it's something that informs my apologetics.

However, I was recently reading two books that prompt me to revisit the issue of apologetic methodology: *Why Should I Believe Christianity?*, by James Anderson, and *Four Views On Christianity and Philosophy,* P. Gould &. R. Davies, eds.

1. Let's begin with a standard evidentialist approach to making a case for Christianity. Some evidentialists attempt to cut to the chase with the "minimal facts" argument for the Resurrection

2. Other evidentialists mount a cumulative case. This may include some or all of the following elements:

i) List criteria for assessing worldviews, viz. consistency, simplicity, explanatory scope, evidence, correspondence to known facts, a theory of justified belief.

ii) List criteria for assessing testimonial evidence, viz. prior expectations; incentive to be truthful or untruthful; firsthand/secondhand information; proximity in time and/or place to the ostensible event; independent, multiple-attestation; corroboration from non-Christian sources.

3. Present arguments for the existence of God.

4. Field objections to the existence of God, viz. the problem of evil.

5. Present arguments for the possibility and credibility of miracles.

6. Present evidence for the general historical reliability of the Gospels.

7. There are variations on the cumulative case. An apologist might include more or fewer steps. In case you're wondering, I have in mind apologists like Gary Habermas, Timothy & Lydia McGrew, John & Paul Feinberg, Michael Licona, Richard Swinburne, and John Warwick Montgomery.

II. I think this approach has definite merits. But I also have reservations or criticisms, so let's run back through the list:

1. A "minimal facts" argument is vulnerable from different angles. There's an over-reliance on "scholarly consensus". Likewise, an atheist may say any naturalistic explanation, however unlikely, is more likely than a supernatural explanation.

2.

i) If we're attempting to demonstrate that something is true or false, then we have to use criteria as a standard of comparison. Sometimes these are unstated or taken for granted.

ii) However, the identification and justification of criteria are presuppositional issues. So here's one point at which evidentialism and presuppositionalism intersect. Take the

relationship between consistency and explanatory scope. There are tradeoffs. A simpler explanation may have less explanatory scope.

Unbelievers typically favor atheism because it's simpler. But that begs the question. An explanation ought not be simpler than reality. Simplicity and explanatory scope go to deep, contested issues regarding what there is to be explained, viz, abstract objects, values, consciousness.

So the identification and justification of criteria becomes somewhat circular inasmuch as it makes key assumptions about the kind of world we live in. Moreover, it's somewhat circular inasmuch as the nature and existence or nonexistence of God is fundamental to the kind of world we live in. So this gets very complicated very fast.

3. Both evidentialists and presuppositionalists can present arguments for God. Some of these are quite theory-laden. For instance, the moral argument for God presumes moral realism. That has no traction for an atheist who rejects moral realism.

The kalam cosmological argument presumes the A-theory of time. It denies the possibility of an actual infinite past. By contrast, the B-theory of time allows for an actual concrete infinite. Both theories may deny the possibility of "traversing" an actual concrete infinite. But so long as an actual infinite timeline comes into being all at once, that's possible on the B-theory. So a proponent of the kalam cosmological argument needs to supplement his argument by making a case for the A-theory of time.

4. The problem of evil has a presuppositional aspect. If you deny moral realism, then there is no problem of evil in the

sense of moral evil, although there will still be a problem of deprivation and suffering.

5. The possibility and credibility of miracles are presuppositional issues. It goes to the kind of world we live in. What is possible or impossible in our world. And that, in turn, bookends the question of what is probable or improbable.

And, once again, this raises the specter of circularity. How do we balance the evidence for miracles against the alleged evidence for the uniformity of nature? How do we know what kind of world we live in? Atheists typically think the alleged evidence for the uniformity of nature overwhelms any ostensible evidence for miracles. But, of course, that's circular. So we need to distinguish between vicious and virtuous circularity.

6.

i) Up to a point, I don't object to this as an apologetic strategy. However, one difficulty is how to make the jump from the general historical reliability of the Gospels to the inspiration of Scripture. To the Bible as the word of God.

Some scholars, like Craig Evans and Richard Bauckham, never seem to make that jump. They don't seem to operate with a doctrine of inspiration. For them, general historical reliability is sufficient.

Yet that's theologically deficient. The God of Judeo-Christian theology is a God who speaks as well as acts. Who speaks to and through people.

Montgomery attempted to bridge the gap by claiming that if you can prove the Resurrection, based on the general

reliability of the Gospels, then the Resurrection proves the deity of Christ. And once you prove the deity of Christ, then Christ can vouch for the inspiration of the OT–and by analogy, the prospective NT. But a problem with his argument is that Christ's resurrection doesn't imply Christ's deity.

ii) Apropos (i), evidentialists typically avoid defending the inerrancy of Scripture. In some cases they think that's a distraction. In some cases they either deny the inerrancy of Scripture or regard that as expendable.

However, you can't simply decouple the general historical reliability of the Gospels from challenges to inerrancy, for while the general reliability of the Gospels is compatible with some contradictions or historical mistakes, when a critic like Bart Ehrman produces a long list of alleged contradictions and historical mistakes, if that list is demonstrative, then you end up with the general unreliability of the Gospels.

So even the evidentialist can't avoid responding to objections to the inerrancy of the Gospels. At the very least, he has to cut it down to something consistent with the general reliability of the Gospels.

7. Finally, the schematic nature of the cumulative case may foster the misimpression that a person can't know Christianity is true, or be warranted in believing that it's true, unless he checks each box in that order. However, the logical order in which we prove something may be very different from how we come to know it. Likewise, there can be different kinds of evidence for knowing something and proving something. I know that I went to high school… because I went to high school. I remember attending high school. That's an argument from experience. If, however, I

was proving to you that I went to high school, that would involve showing you the school I attended, showing you school records, showing you my picture in the yearbook.

An open question to presuppositionalists

I'm going to comment on an article by a guest contributor to Frank Turek's website:

http://crossexamined.org/open-question-presuppositionalists/

> It is my understanding that according to the Calvinistic interpretation of Scripture, human reasoning is so totally depraved that any effort to understand or believe the Gospel is futile.

That's inaccurate. It combines two different claims in one statement. These need to be distinguished:

i) The unregenerate cannot *believe* the Gospel

ii) The unregenerate cannot *understand* the Gospel

Calvinism affirms (i) but denies (ii). According to Calvinism, the unregenerate are able to understand the Gospel. The impediment to the Gospel isn't primarily intellectual, but ethical. They are unreceptive to the truth of the Gospel.

> Unless and until the Holy Spirit regenerates the reprobate mind, a person will continue to suppress the truth regardless of how well it is articulated or argued for.

True, but we need to distinguish between a capacity to understand and a willingness to believe what one

understands. They reject it *because* they understand it, and it rubs them the wrong way (e.g. Jn 3:19).

That's not just a Calvinist distinction. This is corroborated by experience. It's very common for people to reject unwelcome truths out of hand. People tend to accept what they are predisposed to accept and reject what they are predisposed to reject. We see this all the time in the culture wars.

> In addition, the Calvinistic view of God’s sovereignty entails that God causally ordains all things that come to pass.

I don't know what Toy means by "causally ordains". What does "causally" add to "ordain"? What does "ordain" add to causally?

It would be clearer to say that God predestines or predetermines whatever happens. Or, if you wish to use causal language, we could recast that in counterfactual terms: nothing happens unless God planned for that to happen.

> There is no sense in which God merely “permits” things to occur.

There is a sense in which God permits things to happen. God permits what he doesn't prevent.

It is true, though, that God doesn't *merely* permit things to occur.

> Everything that comes to pass, to include the unbelief of the reprobate, comes to pass because in so

> happening God will bring the most glory to Himself.

The notion that God does things to "bring glory to himself" is often misstated or misconstrued. God doesn't do anything for his own benefit. God has nothing to gain by what happens in the world. Events reveal the glory of God, but they don't add to God's glory. Rather, God does things for the benefit of the elect.

> Here in lies a problem I don't believe the Presuppositionalist will be able to get out of.

We'll see about that.

> Still, while an understanding of this may lead to a Calvinist carefully weighing the decisions he makes in the future, he still must acknowledge that all events in the past have occurred the way they did due to the Sovereign Decree of God.

True. However, let's forestall a common confusion. As even an arch freewill theist like William Hasker:

> Before going into the arguments for determinism, it is necessary to remove some misconceptions about the determinist position. To begin with, it must be emphasized most strongly that determinists do not deny that people make choices…Furthermore, the experience of choosing–of seeing alternatives, weighting their desirability and finally making up one's mind–is not any different whether one is a libertarian or a determinist. For while determinists believe that there are sufficient conditions which will govern their choices, they do not know at the time when they are

> making a decision what those determinants are or how they will decide as a result of them. So, like everyone else, they simply have to make up their own minds. The difference between libertarian and determinist lies in the interpretation of the experience of choice, not in the experience itself, W. Hasker, **METAPHYSICS**, 37.

Determinism involves what lies *behind* the decision-making process. Often unconscious factors.

> This being said, I would like you to consider someone like Dr. Frank Turek who is not a Calvinist and uses the Classical Apologetics method. Based on the admission of Reformed theologians themselves, it seems to me that a Calvinist has to believe that ultimately the reason that Dr. Turek is in error regarding God's Sovereignty and the proper apologetic method is because God has not granted it to him to understand these things.

True. Of course, the same dynamic applies *within* Calvinism. For instance, some Calvinists affirm the eternal generation of the Son while other Calvinists disaffirm the eternal generation of the Son. They can't both be right. God predestined that one Calvinist would be right about that while another Calvinist would be wrong about that.

> Just as the reprobate man's fallen reason can never lead him to God, neither can Dr. Turek's reason lead him to the truth of Reformed theology unless and until the Holy Spirit grants it to him to understand it.

I'm not sure what Toy means by the "Holy Spirit granting it to him to understand it". Calvinists don't have extra

information, supplied by the Holy Spirit, that Turek lacks. This is not about regeneration or even illumination. Rather, is about predestination and providence. For instance, God uses social conditioning to cultivate certain beliefs.

> If Dr. Turek persists in his error, he does so only because God has sovereignly determined before the foundation of the world that he would be in error…

True. Again, though, predestination is different from the distinctive work of the Holy Spirit.

> ...for through Dr. Turek's theological errors God will bring the most glory to Himself.

Theological error can be a foil for theological truth. It provides a contrastive background.

> In other words, you can REASON from the text.

Calvinism doesn't deny that people can reason from the text of Scripture.

> Of course our human reasoning is fallen. That's why the Holy Spirit has to reveal the truth to us. I can know that my exegesis is correct because I begin epistemologically with God. Having put my faith in God thanks to the Holy Spirit's regeneration, I can be confident that God has revealed the truth to me.

There may be some lay Calvinists who put it that way, but that's confused.

i) The Holy Spirit doesn't reveal the true interpretation of Scripture to a reader. At most, sanctification can make a

reader more receptive to what Scripture says.

ii) "Beginning epistemologically with God" is about the justification of knowledge. Epistemic justification. That's a separate issue from exegesis.

BTW, many lay Arminians say the Holy Spirit reveals the true interpretation of Scripture. That's a part of folk evangelicalism.

> But if that’s the case how could you ever confidently know that anything you believe is true? I suspect you’ll say because God has revealed it to you, but that would just be arguing in a circle. You just admitted that if God wants someone to be in error then they will certainly be in error, including me and including you! How can you know that what God has revealed to you isn’t an error so that He can bring more glory to Himself by your being incorrect?

That's analogous to the Cartesian Demon. If, however, that's a problem for Calvinists, then that's no less a problem for freewill theists. Toy said "Here in lies a problem I don’t believe the Presuppositionalist will be able to get out of." But once you float hypotheticals like that, everyone is in the same boat. Toy could say that conclusion only follows from Calvinism, and he rejects Calvinism, but that's "arguing in a circle", for if God wants Toy to be in error about freewill theism, then Toy has no independent frame of reference to see the error of his ways. So his objection either proves too little or too much.

> I have asked this question to Calvinists before and never received an answer with any more substance

> than, “You just don’t understand Calvinism!” or “It’s more diamond shaped than that!”

Depends on who you're asking. If I wanted to understand open theism, I wouldn't ask a roommate who happens to be an open theist. Rather, I'd read books by noted exponents of open theism like William Hasker and Alan Rhoda. If I wanted to understand Arminianism, I wouldn't ask a layman who attends a Wesleyan church. Rather, I'd read books and articles by noted exponents of Arminianism like Thomas McCall and I. H. Marshall.

> This I think truly exposes the fatal flaw of the Calvinist’s embrace of Divine determinism.

Notice that Toy is raising an a priori objection to Calvinism. Even if the Bible clearly taught Calvinism, Toy will reject the witness of Scripture because he thinks Calvinism suffers from a "fatal flaw".

> As William Lane Craig has stated, once a person embraces determinism of any sort a strange vertigo sets in. One very well may believe true things, but only because they’ve already been determined to believe those things just as much as their opponents have been determined to believe false things. In such a system, nothing can be rationally affirmed.

i) That's a popular philosophical blunder. Determinism doesn't make beliefs ipso facto irrational. If beliefs are determined by an unreliable belief-forming process, that would make them irrational–but if beliefs are determined by a reliable belief-forming process, that would make them rational. Determinism alone is neutral on the rationality of

beliefs. Even an eminent freewill theist like Swinburne concedes that fact:

> It has been argued that any argument for determinism would be self-defeating. For suppose a scientist discovers an apparently cogent argument for determinism. He will conclude that he has been caused to believe that his argument is cogent. But when we discover of people that they are caused to hold beliefs—e.g. as a result of the way they were educated, or of subjection to drugs—we do not regard them as having a rationally justified belief. To be rational in adopting a belief we have to do so freely, i.e. uncaused, the argument goes. So no one can ever be justified in believing determinism to be true. For one who believes determinism to be true must believe his belief to be caused and so unjustified. (There is a statement of this argument, subsequently retracted, by J. B. S. Haldane in his *Possible Worlds*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1930, p. 209. For references to other statements of it, including one by Epicurus, and discussion thereof, see K. R. Popper and J. C. Eccles, *The Self and its Brain*, Springer, New York, 1977, pp. 75 ff.) This argument has, I believe, no force at all. The mere fact that our beliefs are caused is no grounds for holding them unjustified. Exactly the reverse. I argued in Chapter 7 ["Beliefs"] that to the extent that we regarded them as uncaused or self-chosen, we could not regard our beliefs as moulded by the facts and so likely to be true. The point is rather that if we see some belief to be caused by a totally irrelevant factor (e.g. a belief that I now am being persecuted being caused by something irrelevant in my upbringing) then we rightly regard it as unjustified. But

> a belief that determinism is true could be both caused and justified, if caused by relevant factors, e.g. hearing relevant arguments. Richard Swinburne, **The Evolution of the Soul** *(revised edition)* (OUP, 1997), p. 233, fn. 2.

ii) Moreover, Toy fails to consider the alternative. If beliefs are the result of indeterminism, then true beliefs are accidentally true. Whether I believe truth or falsehood comes down to luck of the draw.

> I know that there is more to be discussed, but I don't believe it is helpful at this point to simply appeal to the Scriptures that a Calvinist would use to defend their view of Divine determinism. Doing so would presume that you are engaging in proper exegesis, which can't be the case if you are relying on fallen reasoning capabilities…

That's a popular misconception of Calvinism. Calvinism doesn't deny that readers can use reason to engage in proper exegesis. Not only can the regenerate use reason to engage in proper exegesis, but the unregenerate can use reason to engage in proper exegesis. Some secular Bible scholars interpret the Bible more accurately than some Christians.

> …and can't be rationally affirmed if you are relying on God to have revealed the truth to you.

Again, I don't know what Toy means by God revealing the truth to you. Does he mean a propositional disclosure? If so, Calvinism denies that God conveys extra information to Calvinists in particular or the regenerate in general.

> Simply put, it is impossible to begin epistemologically outside oneself.

True, but that's distinct from *warranted* belief. Epistemic justification can certainly include criteria that are external to oneself. Indeed, that's a hallmark of evidentialism–which Toy espouses.

> Unless we assume that our reasoning capabilities are generally reliable, arguments about any topic can’t go anywhere.

That piggybacks on Toy's persistent misconception of Calvinism. It's a systematic error that vitiates his entire analysis.

What's presuppositionalism?

For years there's been controversy over the correct interpretation of Van Tilian apologetics. I don't comment on this very often because I think it's usually a blind alley.

What accounts for persistent disagreement regarding the interpretation of Van Tilian apologetics? I'm reminded of what the SEP entry on the double effect principle says: "It is not at all clear that all of the examples that double effect has been invoked to justify can be explained by a single principle."

And that may be a large part of the difficulty in pinning down Van Tilian apologetics. Perhaps it's not the outgrowth of a single overarching principle, but a family of related positions. Or maybe they're not all closely related. Maybe some elements are adventitious.

1. TAG

Considered in isolation, even though it's associated with Van Tilian apologetics, and sponsored by Van Tilian apologetics, as if that's a distinctive of Van Tilian apologetics, there's no reason why TAG couldn't be just one among a range of a priori and a posteriori theistic proofs. No reason, at this discrete level, that it couldn't be incorporated into classical apologetics or figure in a cumulative case approach.

2. The necessity of TAG

If, however, we take a step back and ask why TAG is said to be necessary, or why transcendental arguments generally are important or indispensable, then at that

underlying level it's not just one of many theistic proofs. Rather, Van Til's contention is that we naturally take many fundamental truths for granted that are groundless unless God exists. And not mere theism, but Reformed theism.

On that broader and deeper level, the claim is that TAG reflects a distinctive, all-embracing, and unifying orientation regarding the justification of knowledge. Without that theistic grounding, global skepticism looms large. Even if TAG is compatible with classical theism, or a commutative case metrology, the *rationale* for TAG is more foundational. As the IEP entry puts it, "Transcendental arguments are partly non-empirical, often anti-skeptical arguments focusing on necessary enabling conditions either of coherent experience or the possession or employment of some kind of knowledge or cognitive ability, where the opponent is not in a position to question the fact of this experience, knowledge, or cognitive ability, and where the revealed preconditions include what the opponent questions. Such arguments take as a premise some obvious fact about our mental life—such as some aspect of our knowledge, our experience, our beliefs, or our cognitive abilities—and add a claim that some other state of affairs is a necessary condition of the first one."

On this view, even if there's nothing distinctively presuppositional about TAG, there is something distinctive about transcendental theism.

3. Reductio ad absurdum

In addition, Van Til had a two-prong strategy for apologetic dialogue or analysis: assume their viewpoint

for the sake of argument and take it to a logical extreme; have them assume the Christian (i.e. Reformed) viewpoint for the sake of argument and take it to a logical extreme. Compare and contrast their respective explanatory power or reductionism. A reductio ad absurdum or argument ad impossibile.

(3) is related to (2). As a Calvinist, Van Til thought that for experience to be coherent, everything must happen for a reason. Every event must be coordinated in a part/whole, means/ends relation, according to a wise and benevolent master plan for the world (predestination, meticulous providence). By contrast, theological indeterminism leads to loss of ultimate coherence. Uncontrolled, uncoordinated events that are individually pointless, going nowhere.

4. Divine incomprehensibility

Due to his interpretation of divine incomprehensibility, Van Til didn't think it was possible to prove God directly. His intuition seems to be that if God is paradoxical, then he defies straightforward proof.

There are other components to his overall thinking, but those are crucial features, I'd say. Is this a tight package? If you accept (2), then that commits you to (1). On the other hand, you could see the value of (1) without strong commitment to (2).

Likewise, belief in (4) commits you to (1), and perhaps to (2), but you can see the value of (1) and or (2) without a strong commitment to (4).

(3) is a practical strategy rather than a principle, although (3) may be a way of illustrating the contrasting alternatives

implicit in (2).

Another issue is whether transcendental arguments are, in fact, a unique kind of argument. According to the SEP entry,

> As standardly conceived, transcendental arguments are taken to be distinctive in involving a certain sort of claim, namely that *X* is a necessary condition for the possibility of *Y*—where then, given that *Y* is the case, it logically follows that *X* must be the case too. Moreover, because these arguments are generally used to respond to skeptics who take our knowledge claims to be problematic, the *Y* in question is then normally taken to be some fact about us or our mental life which the skeptic can be expected to accept without question (e.g., that we have experiences, or make certain judgements, or perform certain actions, or have certain capacities, and so on), where *X* is then something the skeptic doubts or denies (e.g., the existence of the external world, or of the necessary causal relation between events, or of other minds, or the force of moral reasons).
>
> https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendental-arguments/

But couldn't some other theistic proofs be framed in similar terms? They take some generally uncontested fact like the existence of the physical world, or thinking beings, then give reasons for supposing that God supplies a necessary condition for their existence. Cosmological arguments give reasons for why God supplies a necessary condition for the possible and actual existence of the universe. Teleological arguments give reasons for why God supplies a necessary

condition for certain types of natural organization. The moral argument gives reasons for why God supplies a necessary condition for moral realism. The argument from reason and argument from consciousness give reasons for why God supplies a necessary condition for consciousness and the reliability of reason.

To be sure, some people deny moral realism, &c., but then you just recast it in hypothetical terms: If moral realism is true, then that it must be grounded in God. If mathematical realism is true, then it must be grounded in God. If modal realism is true, then it must be grounded in God. The existence of something necessary is a prerequisite for the existence of something contingent. And so on and so forth.

Perhaps they are treated as distinctive because, as originally conceived, they are epistemological theistic arguments. But is the epistemological application an exclusive kind of argument or a specific application of a more general principle?

Knowledge and ignorance of God

> **18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened (Rom 1:19-21).**

1. I'm going to use this passage as a launchpad to discuss a number of related issues. Some presuppositionalists appeal to Rom 1 to justify the claim that apologetics is superfluous. You don't need to prove God's existence, because sinners already know that he exists. There are, however, several problems with that appeal.

2. According to traditional Reformed theology,

The knowledge of God is innate or naturally implanted in the human mind…It is best construed as an innate disposition, present from birth, to form belief in God in a spontaneous manner upon mental maturation and experience of the world. It is contrasted with knowledge acquired by testimony or teaching, lengthy investigation, or reflective thinking and logical analysis. Belief in God, then, originates from the natural constitution of the human person as a rational moral agent. Michael Sudduth, *The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology* (Routledge, 2009), 57.

But for several reasons, that doesn't ipso facto moot the need for apologetics:

3. Counterbalancing the aforesaid statement, Reformed theology also accentuates the noetic effects of sin. Does Rom 1 indicate that the knowledge of God is an occurrent belief? Or has "suppressing the truth," becoming "futile" and "darkened" in reason, succeeded in either eradicating the natural knowledge of God or at least rendering that inaccessible? Is there a residual subconscious knowledge of God? I think Rom 1 lacks the specificity to answer that question.

It's possible that the reprobate or unregenerate are ignorant of God's existence. That, however, wouldn't be innocent ignorance but culpable ignorance. Assuming they're ignorant of God's existence, that's the result of hardening themselves to God.

In that event, apologetics is useful in compensating for the loss of natural knowledge of God. In addition, even if they are in a state of denial, apologetics is a pressure point which makes it harder for them to evade their subliminally repressed knowledge of God.

4. In addition, Christian theism is much more specific than Rom 1:20. So even if the reprobate or unregenerate retain natural knowledge of God's "eternal power" and "divine nature", that falls well short of Christian theism, which depends on historical knowledge of Bible history, the life of Christ, and theological interpretation, provided by the Bible. So it may still be necessary to provide arguments for Scripture.

5. For that matter, much of the NT is devoted to defending the Gospel by refuting heresy and false teachers. But that's a department of apologetics.

6. Let's consider an illustration to model the traditional Reformed view. Suppose I have a clock by my bed. An analogue clock with an illuminated dial.

Let's say I wake up at night and glance at the clock. It displays 3AM.

Looking at the readout causes me to believe that it's 3AM. I don't consciously infer that it's 3AM. My belief that it's 3AM is automatically formed by seeing the readout.

That's an example of tacit knowledge, in the sense that I have evidence for what I believe, but my belief is a spontaneous, prereflective belief. Although I have evidence for my belief that it's 3AM, I don't have to *provide* evidence to have that belief. I simply find myself in that doxastic state. When exposed to certain kinds of evidence, we are psychologically designed to respond to that evidence by forming a corresponding belief. The evidence, in conjunction with our psychological makeup, automatically produces a corresponding belief. By analogy, Christians can be justified

in their faith even if they can't provide a formal justification.

7. The fact that my belief is not the result of reflection or logical analysis doesn't mean I can't defend my belief, if challenged. I can go back a step and say I believe the readout is true because clocks are designed to keep track of time. Moreover, I set the clock by consulting an international standardized timekeeper via the Internet. So that's analogous to apologetics.

8. Of course, that's not a failsafe. What if there was a power outage while I was asleep? Power was restored an hour later. So the readout is wrong.

If, moreover, I have other electric clocks in the house, they will be synchronized, because they share a common power source, so I can't recognize and correct my error by looking at another clock.

In response to that challenge, I could go back another step. There are various ways to recognize and correct for error in that eventuality. It might cause me to be late for my appointment. I'd find out the hard way. Or I might check my wristwatch. Because it's battery operated, it has a separate power supply, so that provides an independent standard of comparison. Same thing with my computer clock.

And the same principle holds true for apologetics. In philosophy, to prove one thing, you take another things for granted. But if challenged, you can take a step back to defend your operating assumptions.

9. Another objection is that I might misread the clock or misremember the readout. So even if the clock is accurate, I could still be mistaken.

That's true, but as with (8), I have multiple opportunities to correct my mistake. Is it plausible that I will consistently misread or misremember every clock? My belief isn't confined to a single impression or a single source of evidence. I have redundant evidence. Even if a particular instance could be mistaken or misleading, it's hardly plausible to suppose that every instance is mistaken or misleading.

10. This goes to a larger issue. Some people think that unless you can rule out the hypothetical possibility of error, that you really don't know what you believe. But that's a dubious principle. If the clock is accurate, and my memory is accurate, then I'm not mistaken. How does that not count as knowledge? If, in any particular case, my source of information is reliable, and my interpretation is correct, how does the fact that I'm mistaken in other cases nullify cases in which I'm not mistaken?

This goes to a failure to distinguish between first-order knowledge (knowing X) and second-order knowledge (knowing how you know X). A distinction between knowledge and proof. But even if I can't eliminate the hypothetical possibility of error, how does that imply that I don't know something in all the cases where I'm not in error? In cases where I have good reason for what I believe?

11. Suppose a skeptic said, how do you know someone didn't sneak into your bedroom while you were asleep and reset your wristwatch? The same person monkeyed with your fuse box to cause a temporary power outage. Now your electric clock and wristwatch are synchronized so that both give the wrong time!

Suppose I can't disprove that baroque hypothetical. So what? Why should I fret over skeptical thought-experiments that are beyond my control? What's the point of positing a hypothetical dilemma in which I can't distinguish truth from error? What purpose does it serve to show me that I can't do anything about it? My predicament would be exactly the same if you didn't point that out to me.

If atheism is true, you have nothing to gain and everything to lose by believing it. If Christianity is true, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by believing it. So these are not symmetrical options.

Blank slate historiography

> It is important to know that I am a historian. When the practice of history is conducted with integrity, the historian does not allow himself or herself to allow their theological presuppositions to weigh into their investigation. After all, the results of one's inquiry may reveal that certain presuppositions are mistaken. For example, an atheist historian should not bring his or her presupposition "God does not exist" to an investigation of Jesus' resurrection. For it would force the conclusion that Jesus did not rise from the dead, in spite of the abundant and forceful evidence to the contrary. Conversely, if I as a Christian historian want to conduct an investigation in the Gospels with integrity, I cannot bring a theological conviction that the Bible is God's infallible Word to that investigation. Historians who practice with integrity must come to an investigation being as open as possible to what it may yield, even if what it yields suggests something I presently believe must be modified or abandoned. Otherwise, one ends up being guided more by his or her presuppositions rather than the historical data. That's practicing theology or philosophy; not history.
>
> https://www.risenjesus.com/reading-adapted-form-jesus-teachings-johns-gospel

i) That's an inadequate framework. On the one hand, Christian apologists want to be able to say that Muslims and Mormons (to take two convenient examples) shouldn't bring a theological conviction that the Quran or the Book of Mormon is God's infallible Word to their investigation. However, the way Licona has framed the issue is asymmetrical. The logical alternative to "God does not

exist" isn't scripture (e.g. the Bible, Book of Mormon, Koran) is God's infallible Word. There's a continuum. Theological presuppositions needn't be that specific.

ii) The problem with suspending your theological convictions is that God's existence or nonexistence has far-reaching ramifications for ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics in general. Yet any investigation into a religious claimant must operate with some criteria. But criteria are value-laden. We don't come to any text as a blank slate. And we can't evaluate any text as a blank slate. We must take some philosophical, theistic, or atheistic operating assumptions for granted. We either come to the text with theistic or atheistic operating assumptions. There's no middle ground between atheism and theism, per se– although there are varieties of theism and degrees of atheistic commitment.

Criteria make assumptions about the nature of the world we inhabit. About what's possible, impossible, probable, or improbable. Consider presuppositions regarding the general reliability of reason, sense perception, testimonial evidence, and induction. An expectation that the world is in some measure comprehensible. That math and logic are applicable to the external world, and not merely mental projections or human constructs.

Are these theistic or atheistic assumptions? What must the world be like for these assumptions to be warranted? Assuming these criteria are theistic, a reader ought to bring these theological presuppositions to bear when reading the Bible. He needn't begin with specifically Christian presuppositions. These might intersect with Christian presuppositions. But even if a Bible reader is not initially a Christian, it would be good for him to come to the text with these theistic criteria already in place, if in fact that's the

basis of rationality. The Bible then would complement and undergird those criteria.

iii) One problem with Licona's framework is acting as though every historian either has or ought to have the same viewpoint when investigating religious claimants. But one historian's background may dramatically differ from another historian's background, and the philosophical or theological presuppositions he brings to the text may be warranted or at least enjoy prima facie justification based on prior experience. For instance, suppose a young man was raised in a Christian home. Suppose, moreover, that he has witnessed miraculous answers to Christian prayer. Is he not justified in bringing that background knowledge to bear when he reads the Bible? Doesn't that create a warranted presumption?

iv) Suppose a young man had a secular upbringing. Atheism might be his default frame of reference when examining the Bible, but that can be a provisional frame of reference. Something he holds to lightly, which could be falsified. Experience and inexperience aren't opposing lines of evidence. One is evidence while the other is not.

Likewise, a historian who has no religious background can read the Bible through different filters, comparing and contrasting the explanatory power of a Christian or theistic interpretive grid with the explanatory power of a secular grid. Suppose he's initially noncommittal in either regard. But it's not as if he's coming to the text without a viewpoint. Rather, he's examining the text from competing viewpoints.

v) If the Bible is true, wouldn't we expect the experience of Christians, or at least some Christians, to correspond to the outlook of Scripture? If their extrabiblical experience (e.g.

miracles, answered prayer) already dovetails with the Bible, why shouldn't they bring that to their reading of Scripture? Indeed, if the Bible is true, we'd expect some cross-pollination between Biblical observations of reality and extrabiblical observations. A Christian has access to both. Suppose he, or friends and relatives pray to Jesus because Scripture encourages them to pray for Jesus. Suppose, in some cases, there are unmistakable answers to prayer. That feeds back into his Bible reading.

Is TAG viable?

I was asked to comment on this article:

https://philarchive.org/archive/BKEVTV

I just skimmed his article, so maybe my cursory impressions fail to do it justice. That said:

1. Seems to me that Békefi fails to adequately interact with critics of Stroud, or with Stroud's own reformulations, viz.

https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/the-possibility-of-philosophical-understanding-reflections-on-the-thought-of-barry-stroud/

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendental-arguments/#ObjTraArg

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendental-arguments/#ResObj

https://www.iep.utm.edu/trans-ar/#H4

https://www.iep.utm.edu/trans-ar/#H6

2. I find Békefi's treatment too scattershot, abstract, and generic. He tries to cover too much ground.

Transcendental arguments are a family of arguments. I doubt it's meaningful to try to evaluate them in general. Rather, I think they must be assessed on a case-by-case basis depending on the particular X they claim to be a necessary condition for the possibility of Y.

3. Since there's nothing in philosophy that goes unchallenged, I think it's unnecessary that a transcendent argument should have a major premise that no philosopher questions or denies. That's just not how philosophy works. And it makes the success of transcendent arguments hostage to opponents who are, by definition, the most unreasonable. Why should that be the standard of comparison?

I think it would be wiser to recast transcendental arguments as dilemmas. They demonstrate the ethical, epistemological, or metaphysical cost of denying certain things. They needn't be rationally coercive in the sense of compelling the opponent to say uncle. If an opponent responds to a dilemma by accepting one horn of the dilemma, and if that commits him to radical skepticism or nihilism, that's a successful dilemma because it's exposed how extreme, irrational and/or nihilistic the non-Christian opponent is. That in itself is a very useful exercise. It demonstrates the starkness of the alternatives.

4. Although orthodox Christianity requires the existence of a physical universe, some theistic proofs can be adapted to a Matrix-type scenario.

5. I think it's probably best to use transcendental arguments as part of a cumulative case strategy for proving the Christian faith, rather than a silver bullet. Reality is complex.

6. The Christian faith is a combination of necessary truths and contingent truths. I don't think historical events can be proven a priori.

7. What kinds of things should furnish a major premise for TAG? Candidates include:

i) Abstract objects like possible worlds, laws of logic, and mathematical truths. James Anderson and Greg Welty have been doing yeoman work in that field.

ii) The Trinity

It may not be possible to construct a philosophical argument that specifically demonstrates the Trinity. There are, however, general aspects of the Trinity that may be more amendable to philosophical demonstration:

a) The ontological priority of mind over matter and energy.

b) Reality as ultimately complex rather than simple

c) Interpersonality

iii) Predestination

It's not coincidental that Van Til was a Calvinist. If everything happens according to the master plan of a benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent agent, then everything happens for a reason. The alternative is to interject a destabilizing and decoherent principle of cosmic surdity. We have that in freewill theism and secular alternatives. Where events happen either by blind chance or blind necessity.

iv) Divine revelation

Quine has discussed how our scientific description of the world greatly outstrips the meager input from our five senses. Is it enough to have raw input? Or do we require an authoritative interpretation from a source outside ourselves? To take a comparison, it's like the difference

between seeing a strange light in the night sky crash, and hearing (or watching) a TV newscast announce that an Air Force jet crashed. If all you had to go by was what you saw (heard, and felt), that would be open to multiple interpretations. Having an authoritative explanation outside the purview of the observer is necessary to arrive at the right interpretation.

Sye-Clones

I was asked to comment on a video by YouTube atheist "Ozymandias Ramses II" (or "Ozy" for short). I'm not going to watch hours of his videos. I think the popularity of podcasts and YouTube videos is intellectually lazy. A cumbersome way to expound and analyze complex issues.

However, in response to commenters, Ozy sometimes provides lengthy explanations in writing. I will therefore assess some of his written statements.

From what I can tell, his primary target is Sye Ten Bruggencate and his minions. Another target is Bible Thumping Wingnut (which I never view). Secondary targets may include objectivism (Ayn Rand) and Scripturalism (Gordon Clark and his would-be disciples). Let's begin with some background information:

> I live in Canada. I studied psychology, Western intellectual history, and then philosophy in Montreal (McGill and Concordia), and pursued (never completing) a doctorate in philosophy at UWO in London, Ontario.
>
> With respect to your question about foundationalism and Quine/Neurath, I'm in the latter camp. In fact in some of the shows/hangouts I've challenged the foundationalist/edifice metaphor that informs presuppositionalism in favour of Quine's web of belief and Neurath's raft metaphors with respect to knowledge. In fact, the approach to epistemology I find most promising is Quine's project of naturalized epistemology. I did grad work in that area, specifically on the psychology of belief-acquisition and the enabling

> assumptions (aka properly basic beliefs) that constitute the main timbers within one's raft of belief (or the most well-integrated strands within one's web of beliefs).
>
> I reject the Justified, true belief (JTB) definition of knowledge for a variety of reasons, but my principle objection is that I don't think justification is properly part of the definition of knowledge.
>
> Justification is necessary in life and serves pragmatic purposes, being important for persuasion and for satisfying the conditions of public assertability, but it's not an ingredient in what makes a belief into knowledge. I embrace an externalist account of epistemic justification and repudiate the internalist account of justification as being a pre-theoretical intuition that doesn't stand up to scrutiny and which leads unavoidably to the problem of justificatory regress. Instead of JTB, I define knowledge as 'reliably-produced true belief' which is how some philosophers define it who are working towards Quine's project of naturalized epistemology.

So that's where he's coming from. He's an atheist. I've been told he's an ex-Jehoveh's Witness. Unfortunately, many former cult members are suspicious of religion generally.

> It is condition of reasonableness and rationality that one's confidence in one's belief in any proposition should scale with or be commensurate with the quantity and quality of evidence in support of that proposition. Belief isn't all or none; it admits of degrees of confidence.

True, although we frequently have more evidence for a given belief than we are conscious of.

Certainty may be a psychological desideratum, but it's not a necessitatum. Some presuppositionalists (of the Sye-Clone variety) seem to make a fetish of the idea of certainty, but contra their intuitions and desires on the matter, certainty is not a requirement for knowledge. And if they think certainty is a requirement on knowledge, well....that needs to be argued for. It's a tough argument to make.

Depends on what we mean by certainty:

i) Certainty in the psychological sense of certitude isn't equivalent to knowledge

ii) Knowledge isn't equivalent to proof.

> So, can we be certain of anything? In my view, yes, but that's a heavily qualified 'yes'. To say that some proposition is a certitude is merely to say that within the scope of a set of assumptions, some claims can be put forth as certainties. But that's not the absolute, unconditional certainty that a presuppositionalist lusts after. That kind of certainty is what I call 'hysterical certainty'. It's illusory.

Apparently, that makes Ozy is a global skeptic. But global skepticism is self-refuting (see below).

> Regarding Bahnsen, I'm not sure what point you were making by mentioning his saying that his opponents lose just by showing up. Of course he thinks that. He's a presuppositionalist: He thinks that anyone who uses reason at all is borrowing from his worldview and so has tacitly admitted defeat by showing up for a debate. That's part of their apologetic. Did you think that the more sophisticated presuppers didn't apply

presuppositionalism? Did you think they were going to provide evidence to support their belief in god? That'd make them evidentialists, not presuppers. Their proof (so-called) proceeds by transcendental argument - an alleged demonstration of the impossibilty (due to incoherence) of all other worldviews.

The problem with this entire argument is that you utilized your reasoning in the very act of defending the reliability of your reasoning. This is a manifestly circular argument. If your brain wasn't functioning properly, if your memory was compromised in the very act of evaluating the premises in your argument, if logic was not valid, then you'd have no reason to trust your conclusions. So, you're exactly where you started; you're assuming the very thing you were asked to defend and prove to be the case - namely that your cognitive capacities and the inferential processes you relied upon are reliable. There is no way out of this problem.

The presuppositionalist is simply requiring the impossible: He or she is demanding that you defend rationality, but will only accept a rational argument. Well, one can't have one's reason and eat it too. That's what needs to be pointed out - that one is being asked to do the impossible. The mistake people are making here is to set out on the fool's errand of trying to use one's cognitive capacities and inferential practices (eg: deductive reasoning) to show that those cognitive capacities and inferential practices are reliable. One is simply being challenged to do the impossible. One should never waste one's time trying to do the impossible. One should instead point out that the challenge betrays a confusion on the part of the challenger. Tell them to show you how they do it. Ask

them to put up or shut up. And the moment the presuppositionalist starts with his presuppositional argument and invokes his god as the guarantor of his own inferential practices and cognitive capacities, just point out that he seems to have used his cognitive capacities and inferential processes to reach his conclusion that he can trust his inferential capacities and inferential processes and thus, has argued in a circle and thus has assumed their reliability in the very act of trying to establish their reliability...and so has failed at the challenge they have set out for us.

And the same problem holds for inferential reasoning and for the reliability of our perceptual capacities. These properly basic beliefs are the enabling assumptions that make possible the testing of all our other beliefs about reality, but their reliability cannot be confirmed because we have to utilize them in the very act of evaluating the outcomes which result from acting upon them. They are, in that sense, pre-rational beliefs we are all naturally disposed to believe and by means of which we can formulate and develop ever-improving models of reality.

1) When using the primacy or existence argument - or any argument at all - one is implicitly assuming that inferential process one is using is reliable and can be trusted to yield true conclusions when the very conclusion one is supposed to be demonstrating is that one's inferential processes being used are reliable and can be trusted to yield true conclusions. Why, after all, would you use an inferential process to prove anything unless you assumed its proper application yields true conclusions?

> 2) When using the primacy or existence argument - or any argument at all - one is implicitly assuming that one's own cognitive capacities, in that very act of cognition, are reliable and not malfunctioninng and so can be trusted to yield true conclusions when the very conclusion one is supposed to be demonstrating is that one's cognitive capacities are reliable and properly functioning. Why, after all, would you employ or rely upon a cognitive faculty process to prove anything unless you assumed it was reliable and properly functioning when you were relying it?
>
> Hence that argument, and any such argument, is circular. The reason it feels like a trick is because we don't have any other way of arriving at reasonable conclusions and we're so accustomed to the use of inferential processes and our cognitive faculties that we assume that any conclusion can be supported by such means - but the rationality and reliability of reason and our cognitive faculties is one conclusion which we cannot support in this way, except on pain of circular argumentation.
>
> All circular arguments are junk. There are no virtuous circular arguments.

There are two basic problems with Ozy's objection:

1. He fails to distinguish between a circular *argument/syllogism* and circular *reasoning*.

i) In a circular argument, as I understand it, the conclusion repeats the major premise without the minor premise(s) contributing any additional reasons. Put another way, the difference between an assertion and an argument is that an argument provides reasons in support of a truth-claim.

A circular argument is a technical fallacy of a logical syllogism. It renders the syllogism invalid.

In a valid argument, the major and minor premises combine to yield the conclusion. There's a logical interrelationship between the premises which yield a conclusion over and above the force of each individual premise, separately considered. In that event, the conclusion isn't reducible to the major premise. Rather, the combination of premises mark an advance over the major premise, or any single premise, considered in isolation to the whole.

ii) By contrast, circular reasoning is broader than formal syllogistic argumentation. Every argument takes some things for granted. There's a distinction between presuppositions and premises. Presuppositions are not a part of the argument proper, but underlie the argument. It's not fallacious in the formal logical sense to engage in circular reasoning, where you take certain things for granted, that fall outside the scope of the syllogism (e.g. the external world).

If the presuppositions are in dispute, then it begs the question to take them for granted, but if they're reasonable, inevitable, or shared by both sides, it's not question-begging to take them for granted.

2. His objection is self-refuting. He contends that demonstrating rationality is impossible because the proponent must assume and utilize inferential reasoning in the very act of defending the reliability of his cognitive abilities and inferential processes. But notice that Ozy must rely on his own cognitive abilities and inferential processes to argue that you can't rely on your cognitive abilities and inferential processes to justify human reason! So he himself

simultaneously depends on what he denies. He can't rely on reason show that the reliability of reason is indemonstrable, for that shoots a hole in his boat. If true, it's false; therefore it's false.

> We do not have any way - no test - by means of which we can rule out the possibility of solipsism. Think about that fact you were not taught or told there was a mind-independent reality. It's not a conclusion you reached. Rather, you have never doubted it, just as our pets assume, pre-theoretically and without any process of inference, that the world exists outside of them. We learn what was IN the world, not that there IS a world. Any putative test or evidence you could put forward as a potential demonstration of the veracity of this assumption is perfectly compatible with it all happening in your mind without an external reality. So, you have not reasoned your way to the conclusion that there's a mind-independent reality, you've just always assumed it. And it's not an intuition either. It's a pre-rational assumption that we make by virtue of the sorts of organism that we are.

i) One of the problems with Quine's naturalized epistemology is the status of logic. If logic is reducible to human psychology, to how humans think, then logic is descriptive rather than normative. What makes anything illogical? What makes your inference fallacious rather than mine if there's no intersubjectival standard of comparison, if there's nothing over and above how humans reason? On that view, logic is just an inductive generalization of human psychology. What makes one sample superior to another? Indeed, Quine denied logical necessity.

According to solipsism, my disembodied mind is the only thing that exists. The "physical world" is a hallucination, a

mental projection of my consciousness.

But that means logic is just a product of my contingent mental states. In that event, we can rule out the possibility of solipsism because it nullifies logical necessity. On that view, you can't even affirm or deny solipsism because the law of identity requires logical necessity.

ii) If the physical, empirical world is an illusion, why do I imagine a physical empirical world? Consider dreams. Dreams simulate a physical empirical world because our dream state is parasitic on our waking state. But if there was no physical world to experience, why would that be the content of our imagination?

iii) If I'm the only mind, a disembodied mind, why don't I have a memory of an infinite past? Didn't I always exist?

iv) Do I cease to exist when I'm unconscious (e.g. a dreamless sleep)?

As Ozy concedes:

> With respect to "solipsistic dreamscapes", no one is actually a solipsist. These nightmare scenarios are thought-experiments which serve to shed light on certain concepts by presenting idealized or limiting cases. They help us map out the landscape of possibilities. They are not offered up as plausible outlooks to be embraced.

Yet he seems to deploy that thought-experiment to warrant universal fallibilism. But I think we *can* rule out solipsism (see above).

> You also invoke transitivity of definition at point 5, but it's worth noting that the logical property of transivitity is a basic principle in logic and can't be derived without assuming transivitity itself. Logic can't be defended using logic without arguing in a circle.

It's true that logic isn't directly justifiable. Yet he himself relies on logic to deride the possibility of absolute certainty about anything. So he keeps shooting a hole in his boat.

> So, the moral of the story here is not that we can't trust our memories and other cognitive capacities or that properly basic beliefs are "arbitrary", "intuitions", or "mystical". Rather, it's that, at bottom, rationality is the tool we use, the ladder we climb, to reach conclusions and justify them, but rationality is composed, constituted, out of universally-shared assumptions which are indispensible and which, unfortunately, can't be used to justify themselves. This shouldn't surprise us. Evolution by natural selection furnished us with the sorts of minds we need to survive in the world, but it wasn't trying to make us into epistemic angels who can guarantee that our assumptive dispositions are correct. Mother Nature gave us what will work. She didn't supply us with any guarantees. And that's another reason why the quest for certainty is a fool's errand.

Notice how his argument is only as good as the truth of naturalistic evolution and evolutionary psychology. He temporarily abandons his radical skepticism to affirm naturalistic evolution, but then uses that to sabotage human reason. Once again, he shoots a hole in the bottom of his boat.

> Doubt (to crib a line from Wittgenstein) comes after certainty (the feeling of deep conviction). We presuppose a lot - a whole lot - before we can ever muster a doubt about anything. This is because we do not enter the world as blank slates who are disposed to doubt and don't adopt beliefs until we have reasons and evidence. Rather, we enter the world like other mammals, filled with behavioral and doxastic dispositions, that is, pre-rational assumptions, which are sometimes described as 'properly basic beliefs' by philosophers and cognitive scientists. Among those dispositions are ones to trust our memories, senses, inferential practices and whatever we're told by our epistemic and linguistic communities as we are growing up.
>
> Thus, we are not born as skeptics who learn to believe. We are born credulists who learn to doubt. Doubt happens within the scope of pre-rational properly basic beliefs. And so it is only within the scope of what we already believe and take for granted that specific doubts can arise, be expressed, and explored in the hopes of confirming them or assuaging them. So, could I be wrong about any particular belief within my belief set? Yes. There is no particular belief within my belief set that's immune to the possibility of error.

To be mistaken demands a standard of comparison. False beliefs can't be the criteria for other false beliefs. So either some human beliefs are immune to the possibility of error or all of God's beliefs are immune to the possibility of error, which is what makes the contrast between truth and error coherent in the first place.

> Your objection is a highly intuitive one, but here's why it's question-begging. When you begin with axioms

and then set out to evaluate the feasibility of those axioms by means of an evaluation of the desirability or undesirability of the outcomes resulting from your actions, your evaluation of the desirability or undesirability of the outcomes will rest on a host of properly basic beliefs. Your very ability to recognize an outcome as desirable or undesirability at all requires that you assume, in the very act of evaluating what it happening around you, that:
1) there's a a world around you in which things are actually happening.
2) You will be assuming that you exist, as an agent in that world, and you will only be able to notice what consequences arise from your decisions on the assumption that
3) your perceptual capacities are properly functioning and tracking reality. Further, your ability to reach any conclusions based upon these perceptual experiences of what's resulted from your decisions and actions will rest upon the presumed
4) reliability of your memory.

Just ask yourself, how could you get as far as testing some hypothesis or some axiom's veracity if you couldn't even trust that you were remembering which axiom you were testing or which axiom you'd begun with when you made your decision. Further, if you didn't trust in your
5) inferential practices such as induction and deduction,
you would have no reason at all to trust your own conclusions.

Pragmatism is a marvelous and indispensable thing, as is hypothesis-testing of axioms, but it's only possible within the scope of certain assumption that certain

> facts are already in place and certain capacities we have are reliable. Without assuming those first, we can't evaluate the efficacy of any axioms. So, yes, one can start posit axioms and we can evaluate them, but the evaluation of the feasibility of those axioms presupposes a host of beliefs about us, the world, and the reliability of our cognitive capacities. In short, axiomatic reasoning and evaluation rests upon properly basic beliefs.

i) That may be a legitimate objection against the backwoods Scripturalism of John Robbins and his minions.

ii) However, the fact that certain assumptions are unavoidable in human reasoning is not an argument for skepticism. Rather, that's a launchpad for transcendental reasoning:

> Transcendental arguments are partly non-empirical, often anti-skeptical arguments focusing on necessary enabling conditions either of coherent experience or the possession or employment of some kind of knowledge or cognitive ability, where the opponent is not in a position to question the fact of this experience, knowledge, or cognitive ability, and where the revealed preconditions include what the opponent questions. Such arguments take as a premise some obvious fact about our mental life—such as some aspect of our knowledge, our experience, our beliefs, or our cognitive abilities—and add a claim that some other state of affairs is a necessary condition of the first one. Transcendental arguments most commonly have been deployed against a position denying the knowability of some extra-mental proposition, such as the existence of other minds or a material world. Thus these arguments characteristically center on a claim that, for

some extra-mental proposition P, the indisputable truth of some general proposition Q about our mental life requires that P.

https://www.iep.utm.edu/trans-ar/

Classical apologetics

A few observations about classical apologetics:

In my anecdotal experience, Calvinists who oppose Van Tilian presuppositionalism often take R. C. Sproul as the standard-bearer of classical apologetics. But there are some basic problems with that:

1. Sproul isn't the most competent exponent of classical apologetics. He's a generalist and popularizer. Winfried Corduan, W. L. Craig, Richard Swinburne, and Stephen Davis are more adept exponents of classical apologetics than Sproul.

From an earlier generation, I'd classify Warfield as a classical apologist, although there are many current topics that he doesn't cover.

There's a kind of Reformed chauvinism that latches onto someone simply because he's a fellow Calvinist–one of us–so we first turn to representatives of our own position. However, the fact that Sproul is a Calvinist is completely unrelated to his philosophical competence as an exponent of classical apologetics.

Another well-known proponent of classical apologetics is Norm Geisler. Geisler has mentored a generation of protégés. However, Geisler spreads himself very thin, and he's not a topnotch.

In fact, Corduan is a Calvinist! Although Corduan generally writes for popular consumption, he's more sophisticated than Sproul.

Sorry if this comes across as elitist, but apologetics is an intellectual field. We're up against the best minds that secularism and non-Christian rivals have to offer. So it's necessary to have a standard of comparison.

2. Theologically, Craig, Corduan, Swinburne, and Davis range along a continuum. Swinburne is the least orthodox while Corduan is the most orthodox.

And that draws attention to another point. Classical apologetics uses a two-stage argument: the first step is to use natural theology to establish God's existence while the second step, building on the first step, is to establish Christian theism. That means there's no integral relationship between classical apologetics and Christianity, or any particular Christian tradition. A classical apologist can be a Calvinist, Thomist, Molinist, open theist, Lutheran, Wesleyan, Catholic, Muslim, or Orthodox Jew. Because the first step isn't Christian, a Christian second step isn't entailed by the first step. Although the second step is inseparable from the first step, the first step is separable from the second step.

Because the first stage of the argument is compartmentalized in that regard, the initial stage is not and cannot be informed by Christian theism. The second step can't feed back into our understanding of the first step, which is theologically neutral in a sectarian sense.

That's another reason why it's arbitrary for a Calvinist to reach for Sproul as the go-to guy on classical apologetics. There's no internal relationship between Calvinism and classical apologetics.

Notice that thus far I haven't offered a value judgment on classical apologetics. I'm just offering some clarifications.

3. There's a sense in which truth is circular: a system of logically implicated truths and causally implicated facts. Contingent truths and necessary truths. That gives rise to the cliche that "all truth is God's truth".

But in that event, there's no necessary starting-point in apologetics. You can break into the circle at any point.

Moreover, unlike a two-step apologetic, which is unilinear and irreversible, a circle runs clockwise and counterclockwise. One set of truths will illuminate another set of truths, in no particular order. For reality is holistic. If Christian theism is true, then that truth permeates truth in general. If Christianity is true, then reality is Christian in general–in which case you can't artificially isolate a non-Christian starting-point from a Christian conclusion.

Rather, there's an emerging pattern. The pattern was always Christian, but that may be inevident until more of the pattern is on display.

Classical apologetics is defective in that regard. That's one reason I'm a presuppositionalist rather an a classical apologist.

Revelatory regress

Once again, I'm going to comment on a post by Alex Malpass, an atheist with a doctorate in philosophy.

https://useofreason.wordpress.com/2016/01/27/the-infinite-regress-for-revelational-epistemology/

> Traditionally, it is held that there are two ways of gaining knowledge; either through the senses, or through the use of pure reason...Some presuppositional apologists try to have the best of both worlds, with a third type of epistemological category; revelation.

False dichotomy. Revelation is a very traditional epistemological category. And not just biblical revelation. The heathen believe in various forms of revelation or divination: dreams from gods, apparitions of dead ancestors, &c.

> This has the content of a posteriori knowledge, but with the certainty of a priori knowledge; one can know that God exists 'in such a way that they can be certain'. It is an impressive claim, but one which I think is susceptible to an infinite regress.

I'd avoid casting the issue in terms of "certainty". One problem is that "certainty" is equivocal. At a minimum, it's necessary to specify the type of certainty in view. For instance:

> There are various kinds of certainty. A belief is *psychologically* certain when the subject who has it

> is supremely convinced of its truth. Certainty in this sense is similar to *incorrigibility*, which is the property a belief has of being such that the subject is incapable of giving it up. But psychological certainty is not the same thing as incorrigibility...A second kind of certainty is *epistemic*. Roughly characterized, a belief is certain in this sense when it has the highest possible epistemic status...Certainty is often explicated in terms of *indubitability*.
>
> https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/certainty/

Rather than casting the issue in terms of certainty, I'd recast the issue in terms of what is necessary to ground knowledge.

> There is a simple apologetic mantra, often used by presuppositionalists, about the impossibility of having this type of knowledge unless you are on the right side of the creator of the universe. It says that 'unless you knew everything, or were told by someone who did, it would be impossible to be certain about any matter of fact'. The obvious implication is that only by being directly revealed something by God can we come to know it for certain.

I don't know for sure who Malpass has in mind. He seems to be alluding to Sye Ten Bruggencate, although his characterization would also be applicable to Clarkian Scripturalism.

> I claim that there is a problem for this idea; that it faces an infinite regress. The problem has to do with the possibility of mistaken claims of revelation. So imagine a person, let's call him Sye, who thinks that they have had a revelation from God that p is true. In

> addition, let’s also imagine that some other person, let’s call him Ahmed, thinks that he has had a revelation from God that ~p is true (i.e. that p is false). Now, if we asked him about this, Sye is clearly going to say that only he is correct in this matter. Sye would say that poor old Ahmed mistakenly thinks he has had a revelation when he has not.
>
> But the question would become ‘how can Sye know this?’ Imagine that Sye offers up something about his revelation that he claimed made the difference, and according to which he could tell that his revelation was genuine, and not a mistake. This could only be something relating to the way in which Sye experienced the revelation. But no extra experience could make this difference...The internal experiences of both agents could be exactly similar in all relevant respects, and it is still conceptually possible for at least one of them to be suffering from a false impression.

That raises a raft of issues:

1. I myself think revelation is necessary to ground sense knowledge. Sensory perception gives us appearances. Appearances all the way down. So we can't tell from sensory perception alone to what degree appearance maps onto reality. In that regard, we need revelation as an independent, external check on sensory perception.

Of course, revelation is also processed through the senses, but there's a difference between sensory information and propositional information. While propositional revelation may use sensory perception as a medium, it's distinct from the medium–just as a carrier wave is distinct from what it carries.

However, I wouldn't necessarily argue that revelation is veridical apart from our knowledge of the world. Rather, the two sources of knowledge are complementary.

2. Since I don't wish to have a character named Sye represent my side of the argument, I'll use my own names. Let's call the recipient of revelation Christopher and the mistaken claimant Borg.

3. In Malpass's comparison, Borg isn't a liar or charlatan. He's sincere. He did experience *something*. Let's say it's a hallucination, which he mistakenly identifies with revelation.

4. Christopher and Borg don't have the same psychological experience. In the case of Christopher, there's an objective stimulus causing his impression, whereas, in the case of Borg, it's a figment of his own imagination. So it's incorrect for Malpass to say "the internal experiences of both agents could be exactly similar in all relevant respects" unless both individuals are hallucinating. If, by contrast, one of them really did have a revelation, then his psychological experience is not equivalent to the experience of the hallucinator.

5. That still leaves unanswered the question of whether there's differential evidence given in the revelatory experience itself, apart from external corroboration, that makes it veridical. Once again, I wouldn't normally isolate a revelatory experience from our knowledge of the world, but let's play along with that framework and see how far we can take it. Is it possible to recognize a divine disclosure if all you have to go by is the divine disclosure? Recognition generally uses past experience as a frame of reference. But is it possible to have direct recognition without precedent? Let's take some comparisons:

i) Suppose I'm adopted, but I don't know it. In my teens I happen to encounter one of my biological parents. No one told me who they are. It's a chance meeting. But there's something uncannily familiar about them. And I don't mean family resemblance. Rather, there's a psychological affinity, where I can see myself mirrored in them. Same thing if I had a brother, but we were separated at an early age, and I don't remember him. Then I happen to bump into him one day, and there's something strangely, unmistakably familiar about him, as if I've know this person all my life.

ii) Let's stipulate strong A.I. for discussion purposes. Suppose I design a game with conscious virtual characters. Can I program them to recognize who I am, so that if one of them meets me in the game, he will instantly sense who I am? Suppose I program the characters to have a chess move in the back of their minds. They've had the thought of that chess move for as long as they can remember. Then when they meet me (or my avatar), I mention the chess move–or a countermove. It's a code to trigger instant recognition.

6. It also depends on the mode of revelation. A revelatory angel is a representative of God rather than a direct encounter with God. But suppose I suddenly find myself in the presence of another mind that has total telepathic access to my own mind. It is not, in the first instance, what I know about that being but what he knows about me. I sense that he knows everything about me–the way my Creator would know everything about me. In addition, he makes me aware of what he's aware of. Not everything, but far beyond what I'm naturally capable of apprehending. Can God gives us a preconception or innate idea of what he's like so that if we encountered him, we'd know it was God? Why not?

7. Also, this isn't just hypothetical. Many years ago I underwent old-hag syndrome for about a year. I was conscious of a presence, a mind more powerful than my own. Not divine, but an indication of what it would be in telepathic contact with an overwhelming mind.

So even if we draw the issue narrowly, as Malpass does, I don't think revelatory epistemology generates an infinite regress.

The epistemological boat

In one respect I agree with most of this:

https://maverickphilosopher.typepad.com/maverick_philosopher/2019/01/god-the-cosmos-other-minds-in-the-same-epistemological-boat.html

However, I have several points of disagreement:

i) I don't think the various arguments from evil cast reasonable doubt on Christian theism. I've given my reasons on multiple occasions.

ii) As far as losing faith in God, I suspect what most folks in that situation really doubt isn't God's existence but God's benevolence. And there's a practical link between the two: if you doubt God's benevolence, then the question of his existence is secondary. You just don't care any more whether or not God exists. Where's the relevant point of contrast between an indifferent God and a nonexistent God? An indifferent God isn't looking out for you and a nonexistent God isn't looking out for you.

In terms of religious disillusionment, I don't think God's existence is the primary issue. If you can no longer bring yourself to believe in a God who cares about you, that moots the relevance of whether he exists. The question ceases to be of any interest once you cut the nerve of self-interest.

iii) There's a sense in which God is dubitable in a way that belief in other minds, the past, the external world is not. That, however, is the wrong way to cast the issue. Dubitability or indubitability are psychological states. The criterion shouldn't be psychology but reason, evidence, and justification. What's the explanatory power of naturalism compared to Christian theism? What is necessary to ground

your beliefs?

The important question at issue isn't whether people can and do doubt God's existence, but whether they ought to. Not whether it's possible but whether it's rational.

The problem with TAG

I was asked to comment on this post:

https://useofreason.wordpress.com/2015/11/07/the-problem-with-tag/

I believe Alex Malpass is an atheist with a doctorate in philosophy. He's critiquing a version of presuppositionalism represented by Bahnsen and Butler. Certainly Michael Butler is several notches above the Syeclones. However, I think that's a fairly retro version of presuppositionalism. There are more promising versions. So that's not the version I'd defend.

> Talk of 'the Christian worldview' and 'the non-Christian worldview' is to be taken with a pinch of salt (although this will prove controversial later). Obviously, there are lots of different denominations of Christianity, including reformed Presbyterian, Lutheran, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, etc. Equally, there are many distinct non-Christian positions, including every denomination of every other religious worldview, plus every variation of atheist worldview, etc.

In context, "the Christian worldview" is shorthand for Calvinism. Van Til was a Calvinist and his successors are Calvinists. And his Calvinism is not incidental to his position. In virtue of predestination and meticulous providence, everything happens for a reason. That's an essential component of presuppostionalism, in contrast to freewill theism or non-Christian worldviews where many events are pointless. This doesn't mean presuppositionalism requires Calvinism, per se, but it does require predestination and

meticulous providence. In addition to Calvinism, other examples include the Augustinian tradition, classical Thomism, and Jansenism. Anything along those lines could lay a foundation for presuppositionalism.

> Here is my argument in a nutshell:
>
> 1. TAG is successful only if every non-Christian worldview necessarily entails a contradiction (or is 'internally incoherent').
> 2. There is a potentially infinite number of non-Christian worldviews.
> 3. Either:
> 4. a) There is one way to establish that all the non-Christian worldviews are internally incoherent, or b) One proof is not enough but there is a finite number of ways to establish that they are all incoherent, or c) There is an infinite number of ways required to establish that they are all incoherent.
> 5. No proponent of TAG has established a); and it seems easy to prove that b) cannot be established (given a plausible formalization of 'worldview' as a set of beliefs); and if c) then it is not possible for a finite being to prove TAG.
> 6. Therefore, TAG has not been established, and is likely to be unprovable.

That raises a raft of issues:

i) I don't see why TAG requires non-Christian alternatives to be self-contradictory. Why would it not suffice if non-Christian alternatives lack the explanatory power necessary to account for various things which a worldview should be able to ground?

ii) Even assuming there's a potentially infinite number of alternatives, if many of these share a common flaw, than it's not necessary to disprove them individually. An argument that successfully targets a common flaw will automatically and simultaneously falsify every position that exemplifies that flaw at one stroke. That doesn't necessarily mean all the non-Christian alternatives share a common flaw. There might be sets of non-Christian alternatives that share common flaw, although one set exemplifies a different flaw than another.

iii) The sweeping claim is not as brazen as it might appear to be. If a particular position is true, then all contrary positions are rendered false insofar as they conflict with the true position–although they may be true in other respects, or one contrary position might be true in a certain respect while another contrary position might be true in a different respect. For instance, metaphysics and epistemology in some Indian traditions might have different common flaws than conventional Western naturalism.

iv) We could also recast the claim in hypothetical terms. It isn't necessary to dispatch every potential rival. Rather, show us what you've got. We're prepared to take on every comer.

v) However, a nagging reservation remains. Since the proponent of TAG hasn't actually eliminated all the competition, how can he be justified in believing ahead of time that every non-Christian worldview will be self-contradictory or lack adequate explanatory power? TAG itself can't be the basis for his confidence inasmuch as TAG is untested against much or most of the competition. How does he know TAG is successful? He can't know TAG is successful in advance of using it to eliminate the alternatives, if the success of TAG relies on its proven ability

to eliminate the alternatives. If you don't prove it in the field, what's the basis for your assurance that it will rout all the competition? So the proponent of TAG seems to need some other reason or reasons, independent of TAG, for believing the Christian faith is true, to warrant his prediction that TAG will be invincible against every contender. But in that event, TAG is a supplementary or confirmatory argument for Christianity, which takes its place alongside other arguments or prereflective evidence. I don't think that's a problem. But if that's the case, then TAG won't be able to replace other kinds of arguments or evidence for Christianity.

One could put the point even more simply, as follows. The claim is that every non-Christian worldview is internally incoherent. If by ‘worldview’ we understand a set of propositions believed to be true by an agent, and by ‘internally incoherent’ we mean that the set is inconsistent (i.e. contains a proposition and its negation), then consider the non-Christian worldview that contains only one belief, i.e. {p}. This set is plainly not inconsistent.

But that's artificial nonsense. There can be no worldview that contains only one belief.

The retort will likely be that this ultra-simple worldview cannot ‘account for the intelligibility of human experience’. If so, what are the minimal conditions under which a set of beliefs could achieve this? It is not on the opponent of TAG to provide this analysis; all she has to do is point out that without this analysis the proof cannot be claimed to be established. The proponent of TAG needs to provide this analysis as part of the proof itself.

I agree with him that presuppositionalism can't shift the onus onto the unbeliever. Both sides have a burden of

proof.

In fact, it seems easy to prove that there cannot be one method which disproves every non-Christian worldview, because there cannot be one contradiction that they all share.

That claim is far from self-evident. What reason is there to accept Malpass's assertion? Admittedly, I'd reframe the criterion in terms of explanatory inadequacy rather than self-contradiction.

One natural way of understanding worldviews is that a worldview is just a list of propositions that an agent believes to be true.

There's a sense in which that's true. However, most folks aren't philosophers. Most folks aren't intellectuals. Most folks are pretty thoughtless when it comes to metaphysics, epistemology, and metaethics. Christian apologetics usually targets notable thinkers or schools of thought that make a concerted effort to think through their worldview, and not just what an unreflective individual happens to believe.

[2]There are two objections here: 1) autonomy with respect to reasoning is not unique to the Christian worldview (what prevents other monotheisms from claiming that they also subordinate their reasoning to their god?),

The question at issue is not what they claim but whether that's a demonstrable claim.

and 2) there are Christian worldviews where the intellect is not subordinated to the word of God (there are autonomous Christian worldviews; in fact, almost all conceptions of Christianity apart from the Van Tilian presuppositionalist

account do not explicitly subordinate the intellect to the word of God). So the equivalence of Christian worldview with non-autonomous reasoning fails in both directions.

i) That's hard to respond to because it's so vague. What does it mean to subordinate the intellect to the word of God? If Christian theism is true, then human reason is subordinate to divine reason, in part because divine reason is vastly superior to human reason, and because God is the cause of human reason. And the word of God exemplifies divine reason, making it the standard of comparison.

Perhaps what Malpass is gesturing at is the use of human reason to verify or eliminate revelatory claimants. Doesn't that subordinate the claimants to human reason?

ii) To begin with, if a revelatory claimant is not, in fact, the word of God, then evaluating a spurious revelatory claimant hardly subordinates the word of God to human reason.

iii) But suppose the revelatory claimant is the word of God? In that case, assessing the revelatory claimant doesn't necessarily subordinate the word of God to human reason inasmuch as God designed our minds, as well as the world we use as a frame of reference. To take a comparison, if the same locksmith designed the lock and the key, and I use the key to open the lock, I'm not subordinating the locksmith to the keyholder. Rather, I'm using what he handed me. I'm working within the framework I was given.

iv) But that's complicated by the choice of criteria used to assess revelatory claimants. If truth is the criterion, then that doesn't subordinate the word of God to human reason, for human reason isn't the source of truth. Truth stands above human reason.

Yet there's often a hiatus between truth and the perception of truth. The chosen criteria frequently degenerate into popular prejudice, tendentious standards, and glorified opinion rather than truth. The distinction or dichotomy between fact and what is deemed to be fact or allowed to be fact.

v) In addition, the word of God has the authority to challenge and correct our preconceptions about reality and morality. So there's the tricky issue of how to make the transition from the standpoint of an outside observer sifting candidates to someone viewing the truth from the inside out. Perhaps there's no theoretical solution to this conundrum. It is up to God to place individuals far enough into the truth that they can see their way to the destination.

Van Til on common ground

In this post I'm going to outline my understanding of Van Til on common ground. This is occasioned by Fesko's new book, which I haven't read. I have been reading Dr. Anderson's serial review. I won't document my interpretation by quoting Van Til. I'm not that invested. I'm going to rely on memory. I will also be adding some of my own refinements.

1. Antithesis/common ground

In Van Til's analysis, there's a tension between antithesis and common ground. The tension isn't internal to Van Til's analysis. Rather, it reflects the instability of non-Christian thought.

2. Metaphysical common ground

If Christianity is true, then reality is Christian. The non-Christian exists in a Christian reality. Not a Christian culture, but reality in toto. His physical environment as well as his mind.

At the metaphysical level, the degree of common ground between Christian and non-Christian is total. The non-Christian cannot escape reality. He can deny elements of reality, but since there's no alternative to reality, his flight from reality will always be parasitic on the very reality he labors to overthrow. There is no metaphysical antithesis whatsoever.

3. Hypothetical antithesis

i) To the extent that the non-Christian is epistemologically self-conscious, his goal will be to provide a systematic alternative to the Christian worldview. The aim will be zero common ground between Christianity and the non-Christian alternative. His position will be developed in conscious opposition to Christian theism. However, that's subject to various caveats.

ii) Because there's only one reality, if that reality is Christian, then it's impossible for the non-Christian, however ingenious and indefatigable, to develop a thoroughgoing alternative to reality. So the effort to devise a consistent alternative to Christian theism is doomed to fail. It will always fall short of the goal.

To cast it this in Calvinistic terms, the non-Christian lives in a divinely-defined reality. There are no random events. By virtue of predestination and providence, everything has a purpose. Everything happens for a reason. Moreover, God is the source of possibilities and necessities as well as actualities. There can be no wholesale point of contrast.

So there's a certain paradox or dilemma in the antithetical relationship between Christian theism and non-Christian alternatives. The non-Christian program cannot succeed. There is no other reality to fall back on. The construction materials derive from Christian reality. All the resources at the disposal of the non-Christian are ultimately Christian in origin. I don't mean historically, but metaphysically.

iii) We need to distinguish between non-Christian views that originated independently of Christianity (e.g. ancient Greco-Roman atheism, Buddhist atheism) and non-Christian views that evolved in reaction to Christianity (e.g. Renaissance/Enlightenment atheism).

On the one hand, the antithesis between Christianity and modern Western atheism may be more extreme because Christian theism is the default foil.

On the other hand, the antithesis between Christianity and modern Western atheism may be less pronounced in some respects than pre-Christian atheism because modern Western atheism is ironically influenced by Christianity in a way that pre-Christian atheism wasn't. For instance, Buddhism didn't target Christianity but Hinduism.

In a sense, the outlook of Buddhist atheism is more foreign to Christianity than modern Western atheism inasmuch as Buddhist atheism originated without any reference to Christianity.

iv) It's my impression that Roman Catholicism is the default foil for Renaissance/Enlightenment atheism. That's the primary target. But if, like Van Til, you regard Roman Catholicism as a highly defective representative of Christianity, then that adulterates the antithesis. In a sense, atheists were right to oppose Catholicism, although they opposed the good as well as the bad in Roman Catholicism. And their alternative was bad.

By the same token, the foil for Buddhism and Greco-Roman atheism is pagan polytheism. Once again, that adulterates the antithesis. They were right to oppose pagan polytheism. The problem lies with their alternative.

4. Practical epistemological antithesis

i) Most non-Christians are pretty thoughtless. They're not attempting to construct a wholesale alternative to Christianity.

ii) Due to common grace, non-Christians often retain some common ground with Christians. That varies from one individual to the next as well as from one society to the next.

Is 2+2=4 more certain than God's existence?

Some Christian apologists say 2+2=4 is more certain than God's existence. But is that true?

2+2=4 may be more *evident* than God's existence, but is it more *certain?* Usually, God's existence isn't directly evident because God provides the background conditions for everything else. Of course, there are situations where God can and does make himself directly evident.

Now, it seems to be the case that 2+2=4 is a paradigm-example of a necessary truth. Nothing can be more certain than that.

However, it's easy to imagine an evolutionary scenario in which we were arbitrarily hardwired to think 2+2=4. We can't help thinking that's the case, we can't doubt it, even if that doesn't correspond to reality. That's just how we were programmed by blind evolution.

Sure, we number things, we count things, but that's because we think they can be grouped into collections of twos and fours. But again, what if that's something we project onto physical objects (or events)?

So the deeper question is whether there's something that *makes* it the case that 2+2=4? And is that something God?

I don't mean in a voluntaristic sense, as if that equation is "true" by divine fiat. Rather, mathematical structures are an aspect of God's own mind.

My objective isn't to lay out the argument for that. I'm just pointing out that as a matter of principle, God's existence

may be more fundamental than mathematical equations. If so, then God's existence is more certain than mathematical equations. Their certainty is derivative. It depends on God's existence. Again, that requires an argument, and there's an argument to be had for that.

Strategic priorities in apologetics

> These can each be resolved by simply setting aside Biblical inerrancy.1 A saved liberal Christian is better than nothing, so reserve the above sub-topics for later.
>
> Let me add that you have a virtual responsibility to ensure that your interlocutor knows that one can be a Christian while accepting evolution.
>
> https://beliefmap.org/apologetics-guide/strategic-priorities

1. This reflects an unfortunate trend among some younger generation apologists. They don't think like theologians. Yet Christianity is a religion, so it's necessary to think like a theologian.

2. Although the Bible contains many historical narratives, the Bible is divine revelation. It's not just a historical record of events, but theologically interpreted events. God raises up prophets and apostles to speak to and through them. A supernatural process. Consider the altered conscious states of seers like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and John the Revelator. Or consider the theological interpretations of Paul, the author of Hebrews, &c. Or how the Gospels integrate history with theological interpretation.

3. Is there such a thing as "saved liberal Christian"? Or is that someone with a fundamentally unmodified secular outlook who's tacked on some Christian sentiments?

How is that better than nothing rather than worse than nothing? If he's satisfied with a bad answer, a wrong answer, he has no incentive to seek a better answer. He

took a wrong turn and keeps going in the wrong direction. It's not as if a "saved liberal Christian" is doing God a favor.

4. Many unbelievers will rightly see it as intellectually evasive when Christian apologists duck objections to the inerrancy of Scripture. That doesn't mean a Christian apologist is obligated to individually run through every objection to the Bible. There are lots of good resources we can point a critic to, viz., Craig Blomberg, **The Historical Reliability of the New Testament** (B&H Academic, 2016); D. A. Carson, ed. **The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures** (Eerdmans, 2016); James Hoffmeier & Dennis MaGary, eds., **Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?** (Crossway 2012); Kenneth Kitchen, **On the Reliability of the Old Testament** (Eerdmans 2003); John Oswalt, **The Bible Among the Myths** (Zondervan 2009); Vern Poythress, **Inerrancy and the Gospels** (Crossway 2012); Peter Williams, **Can we Trust the Gospels?** (Crossway 2018). If the critic is one of those frivolous people who recycles canned objections but is too apathetic to examine the answers, that's not the responsibility of a Christian apologist.

5. If evolution is contrary to the Biblical revelation of organic origins, a Christian has no duty to say one can be an inconsistent Christian. While it's possible to be an inconsistent Christian, there's no obligation to commend or recommend intellectual or theological inconsistency. It's not as if a "saved liberal Christian" is doing God a favor.

A Christian apologist lacks the authority to tell people what biblical teachings they must believe and which they are free to disregard. There can be debates about what Scripture teaches, but the principle is to accept all of divine revelation.

"Ten Problems with Presuppositionalism"

I'm going to comment on this:

http://partaij7.blogspot.com/2016/04/ten-problems-with-presuppositionalism.html

According to his profile, John Partain is a philosophy prof. According to the Frame/Poythress website, he used to teach at Covenant College.

I won't directly respond to all ten points. That's because his 10-point critique is very redundant. He repeats the same objections, based on his systematic misrepresentation of presuppositional apologetics.

1. I don't know how much he's read about presuppositionalism. In his post he only mentions two sources: a 32-page booklet, and a single book by Van Til: **A Survey of Christian Epistemology**. There's no evidence that he's read John Frame's **Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief**, or books and articles by Vern Poythress and James Anderson, in which they engage in presuppositional apologetics. He seems to be unacquainted with the most astute exponents of the position he presumes to critique. It's a dereliction of his professional duties for a philosophy teacher to be so uninformed about the position under review.

2. One insight of presuppositionalism is that apologetics can argue *from* Christian theology as well as *for* Christian theology. That's because some Christian presuppositions

have independent explanatory power. You don't need to be a Christian to appreciate that fact. That's not an appeal to authority. Rather, you need to be shown the explanatory power of certain Christian presuppositions. That's not a circular argument, for the exercise is to demonstrate how certain Christian presuppositions can account for facts in a way that atheism is deficient or counterproductive. That's what astute presuppositionalists like Vern Poythress and James Anderson do in some of their writings.

3. Another insight of presuppositionalism is that when engaging unbelievers, we need to point out how much they take for granted. They have many residual beliefs that are inconsistent with their overall worldview. Although they still entertain many true beliefs, their worldview is unable to warrant their true beliefs.

4. Even if we confine ourselves to Van Til, the noetic effects of sin are to some degree offset by common grace. Unbelievers are capable of understanding truth in general, including theological propositions in particular. The problem isn't a lack of understanding, but a lack of sympathy. Unbelievers are resistant to unwelcome truths.

In fact, it's because they can understand theological truths that they reject them. They are hostile to the message.

5. We need to avoid overgeneralizing about unbelievers. They range along a continuum. Many unbelievers don't reject Christianity. They don't know enough about Christianity to reject it. What they think they know about Christianity is piecemeal. Based on hostile, secondhand sources. What they think they reject isn't Christianity, but a malicious and ignorant caricature of Christianity.

Some unbelievers are receptive to the gospel. They are just waiting to be evangelized. At the other end of the spectrum are intellectual atheists who've developed elaborate rationalistic objections to Christianity. In that case, it's necessary for a Christian apologist to remove intellectual obstacles to Christian faith.

Common ground is person-variable. How much common grounds is there between John Partain and John Dominic Crossan?

6. Presuppositionalism doesn't deny that unbelievers can and do know truth in general. It doesn't deny that they can grasp theological propositions.

Rather, the distinction is between what unbelievers can *know* and what unbelievers can *justify*. Given their worldview, unbelievers know many truths for which they are unable to provide an *epistemic justification*.

7. It's bizarre for Partain to suggest that Scripture is sufficient for apologetics. That's an appeal to authority, an authority which unbelievers deny. Unbelievers often raise scientific, philosophical, and historical objections to the veracity of Scripture. Therefore, you can't just quote the Bible.

For instance, unbelievers typically reject miracles. They raise scientific objections to miracles. They appeal to the explanatory power of secular science. The success of naturalistic explanations. They say that "by definition," a supernatural explanation is the least likely explanation. Hence, any naturalistic explanation, however improbable, is more probable than a supernatural explanation.

Therefore, a Christian apologist must make a case for the credibility of miracles. That's a presuppositional issue. A philosophical issue.

By the same token, many unbelievers raise moralistic objections to the Bible. So it's necessary for a Christian apologist to discuss metaethics. Can atheism justify moral realism?

Likewise, some unbelievers say you can't establish the general historical reliability of the Gospels because a true historian must operate with methodological atheism, which automatically discounts the supernatural incidents in the Gospels. Any historical residual will eliminate miracles.

Therefore, a Christian apologist must challenge methodological atheism. That's a presuppositional issue. A philosophical issue.

Moreover, evidentialist apologists don't just quote the Bible. Rather, they attempt to make a case for the general historical reliability of the Gospels. For instance, they appeal to archeological confirmation. Likewise, "classical apologetics" doesn't just quote the Bible. Indeed, classical apologetics tends to focus on natural theology.

Finally, his insistence on common ground conflicts with his insistence on the sole sufficiency of Scripture. For unbelievers, Scripture is disputed ground, not common ground.

8. I don't see that presuppositionalism is committed to a coherence theory of truth to the exclusion of a correspondence theory of truth. Why treat coherence and correspondence theories of truth as mutually exclusive? Shouldn't theories of truth be suited to the nature of the

truths in question? If, say, it's a belief about a state of affairs, then that's more suited to a correspondence theory. If, however, it's about the interrelationship between two or more beliefs, then that's more suited to a coherence theory.

What's the relation in question? A relation between a belief about the world and the world? Or a logical relation between one belief and another? If two beliefs, or propositions, are mutually inconsistent, then they can't both be true.

Moreover, the correspondence theory of truth is complicated. It's odd that a philosophy prof. like Partain relies on dictionary definitions and Nicole's "The Biblical concept of Truth." Compare that to philosophical models of the correspondence theory:

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth-correspondence/

9. The apostles and prophets operate within a theological framework. Indeed, that's often set in explicit contrast to paganism. Theological presuppositions undergird the gospel. Presuppositions about the existence and nature of God. God's activity in the world.

10. If Christian presuppositions are true, then the only "relativism" which presuppositionalism affirms is that truth is relative to truth. What's wrong with that? Presumably, Partain concedes that Christian presuppositions are true.

11. Evidential apologetics can be just as technical or philosophical as presuppositional apologetics. Take the Bayesian evidentialism of Richard Swinburne, Timothy and

Lydia McGrew. When you get into the weeds, that quickly becomes highly technical and philosophical.

Or take **The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology**. Consider Pruss on the Leibnizian cosmological argument, Collins on the fine-tuning argument, Craig and Sinclair on the kalam cosmological argument. Once again, these get very technical.

12. Although transcendental argumentation is a distinctive feature of presuppositional apologetics, it's not an exclusive alternative to traditional arguments. Presuppositionism is compatible with the cosmological argument, teleological argument, argument from prophecy, argument from miracles, argument from religious experience, &c. Van Til's contribution is, in part, to draw attention to what had been a neglected line of argument in Christian apologetics. But using transcendental arguments for God's existence doesn't preclude you from using other kinds of arguments.

13. It's odd that Partain accuses presuppositionalists of being too philosophical at the expense of biblical authority when most critics of presuppositionalism accuse it of begging the question by putting too much emphasis on biblical norms.

14. "When it comes to knowing reality, presuppositions are like glasses cemented to our faces. We cannot see God or other persons or anything else outside of us directly but only indirectly through the conceptual framework or presuppositional state of the mind."

That's simplistic. On the one hand, humans are born with natural glasses. God designed our minds. On the other hand, humans can rebel against God by making tinted

glasses that filter out God. Take village atheists like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, or sophisticated atheists like Theodore Drange, Graham Oppy, Jordan Sobel, Richard Gale, William Rowe, and W. V. Quine, or nominal Christians like Rudolf Bultmann and Schleiermacher. Although unbelievers can see without their tinted glasses, they refuse to do so. It's possible for unbelievers to compare and contrast the view using their natural glasses with their tinted glasses, but some of them are unwilling to remove their tinted glasses.

15. It's unclear what Partain's alternative is. In contrast to presuppositional apologetics, evidential apologetics and classical apologetics are subject to some of the same objections he raises to presuppositional apologetics. His position is unstable. When you argue from the Bible, viz. the argument from prophecy or the argument from miracles, it will be necessary to go beyond the Bible. For instance, the argument from prophecy requires you to establish that the oracle is prior to the fulfillment. That will get you into debates over the date of the sources containing the oracle. Likewise, to establish fulfillment may require appeal to archeological confirmation.

Apologetic methodology revisited

I. For several reasons, I don't normally discuss apologetic methodology. I think it's often a cul-de-sac. Both sides repeat their talking points. Round and round. There's no progress. It's often a substitute for doing apologetics. In particular, presuppositionalists have a bad habit of never getting around to doing apologetics. To their credit, evidentialists produce a lot more apologetics. Finally, I have my own apologetic philosophy. I don't normally talk about it because it's something that informs my apologetics.

However, I was recently reading two books that prompt me to revisit the issue of apologetic methodology: Why Should I Believe Christianity?, by James Anderson, and Four Views On Christianity and Philosophy, P. Gould &. R. Davies, eds.

1. Let's begin with a standard evidentialist approach to making a case for Christianity. Some evidentialists attempt to cut to the chase with the "minimal facts" argument for the Resurrection

2. Other evidentialists mount a cumulative case. This may include some or all of the following elements:

i) List criteria for assessing worldviews, viz. consistency, simplicity, explanatory scope, evidence, correspondence to known facts, a theory of justified belief.

ii) List criteria for assessing testimonial evidence, viz. prior expectations; incentive to be truthful or untruthful; firsthand/secondhand information; proximity in time and/or place to the ostensible event; independent, multiple-attestation; corroboration from non-Christian sources.

3. Present arguments for the existence of God.

4. Field objections to the existence of God, viz. the problem of evil.

5. Present arguments for the possibility and credibility of miracles.

6. Present evidence for the general historical reliability of the Gospels.

7. There are variations on the cumulative case. An apologist might include more or fewer steps. In case you're wondering, I have in mind apologists like Gary Habermas, Timothy & Lydia McGrew, John & Paul Feinberg, Michael Licona, Richard Swinburne, and John Warwick Montgomery.

II. I think this approach has definite merits. But I also have reservations or criticisms, so let's run back through the list:

1. A "minimal facts" argument is vulnerable from different angles. There's an over-reliance on "scholarly consensus". Likewise, an atheist may say any naturalistic explanation, however unlikely, is more likely than a supernatural explanation.

2.

i) If we're attempting to demonstrate that something is true or false, then we have to use criteria as a standard of comparison. Sometimes these are unstated or taken for granted.

ii) However, the identification and justification of criteria are presuppositional issues. So here's one point at which evidentialism and presuppositionalism intersect. Take the

relationship between consistency and explanatory scope. There are tradeoffs. A simpler explanation may have less explanatory scope.

Unbelievers typically favor atheism because it's simpler. But that begs the question. An explanation ought not be simpler than reality. Simplicity and explanatory scope go to deep, contested issues regarding what there is to be explained, viz, abstract objects, values, consciousness.

So the identification and justification of criteria becomes somewhat circular inasmuch as it makes key assumptions about the kind of world we live in. Moreover, it's somewhat circular inasmuch as the nature and existence or nonexistence of God is fundamental to the kind of world we live in. So this gets very complicated very fast.

3. Both evidentialists and presuppositionalists can present arguments for God. Some of these are quite theory-laden. For instance, the moral argument for God presumes moral realism. That has no traction for an atheist who rejects moral realism.

The kalam cosmological argument presumes the A-theory of time. It denies the possibility of an actual infinite past. By contrast, the B-theory of time allows for an actual concrete infinite. Both theories may deny the possibility of "traversing" an actual concrete infinite. But so long as an actual infinite timeline comes into being all at once, that's possible on the B-theory. So a proponent of the kalam cosmological argument needs to supplement his argument by making a case for the A-theory of time.

4. The problem of evil has a presuppositional aspect. If you deny moral realism, then there is no problem of evil in the

sense of moral evil, although there will still be a problem of deprivation and suffering.

5. The possibility and credibility of miracles are presuppositional issues. It goes to the kind of world we live in. What is possible or impossible in our world. And that, in turn, bookends the question of what is probable or improbable.

And, once again, this raises the specter of circularity. How do we balance the evidence for miracles against the alleged evidence for the uniformity of nature? How do we know what kind of world we live in? Atheists typically think the alleged evidence for the uniformity of nature overwhelms any ostensible evidence for miracles. But, of course, that's circular. So we need to distinguish between vicious and virtuous circularity.

6.

i) Up to a point, I don't object to this as an apologetic strategy. However, one difficulty is how to make the jump from the general historical reliability of the Gospels to the inspiration of Scripture. To the Bible as the word of God.

Some scholars, like Craig Evans and Richard Bauckham, never seem to make that jump. They don't seem to operate with a doctrine of inspiration. For them, general historical reliability is sufficient.

Yet that's theologically deficient. The God of Judeo-Christian theology is a God who speaks as well as acts. Who speaks to and through people.

Montgomery attempted to bridge the gap by claiming that if you can prove the Resurrection, based on the general

reliability of the Gospels, then the Resurrection proves the deity of Christ. And once you prove the deity of Christ, then Christ can vouch for the inspiration of the OT–and by analogy, the prospective NT. But a problem with his argument is that Christ's resurrection doesn't imply Christ's deity.

ii) Apropos (i), evidentialists typically avoid defending the inerrancy of Scripture. In some cases they think that's a distraction. In some cases they either deny the inerrancy of Scripture or regard that as expendable.

However, you can't simply decouple the general historical reliability of the Gospels from challenges to inerrancy, for while the general reliability of the Gospels is compatible with some contradictions or historical mistakes, when a critic like Bart Ehrman produces a long list of alleged contradictions and historical mistakes, if that list is demonstrative, then you end up with the general unreliability of the Gospels.

So even the evidentialist can't avoid responding to objections to the inerrancy of the Gospels. At the very least, he has to cut it down to something consistent with the general reliability of the Gospels.

7. Finally, the schematic nature of the cumulative case may foster the misimpression that a person can't know Christianity is true, or be warranted in believing that it's true, unless he checks each box in that order. However, the logical order in which we prove something may be very different from how we come to know it. Likewise, there can be different kinds of evidence for knowing something and proving something. I know that I went to high school… because I went to high school. I remember attending high school. That's an argument from experience. If, however, I

was proving to you that I went to high school, that would involve showing you the school I attended, showing you school records, showing you my picture in the yearbook.

McGrew on Van Til

Timothy McGrew recently raised some fundamental objections to Cornelius Van Til:

> In his **Christian Theistic Evidences**, Van Til spends several chapters critiquing a broadly evidentialist methodology of the kind I endorse, using Butler's **Analogy of Religion** as a foil:
>
> > Hume's empiricism was far more critical and consistent than that of Butler. We proceed to see what happens to the conception of probability on the basis of Hume's empiricism. If all knowledge is based upon experience, and experience is interpreted without the presupposition of the "Author of nature" as Hume claims it is, we cannot expect that one thing rather than another will happen in the future. From the point of view of logic, one thing as well as another might take place in the future.
>
> As for reported miracles, Van Til claims that Hume undermined the credibility of miracle reports chiefly by showing that, on empiricist grounds, "there is no reason to think that a God who could work miracles can be proved to exist." In particular, according to Van Til, Hume demolished the empirical arguments–cosmological and teleological–for the existence of God in his Dialogues concerning Natural Religion…For anyone who, like Van Til, has fallen under the spell of the great Scottish skeptic and acquiesced in these melancholy conclusions, I have good news. Hume was wrong. He was wrong about inductive inference and his

> critique of induction, influential as it was, displays the poverty of his own understanding of probable inference. He was wrong in the objections he raised against the credibility of reported miracles and was resoundingly refuted on this subject by his own contemporaries, as even some modern agnostics have realized…[Hume] is mired in a deductivist framework... Four Views on Christianity and Philosophy, 108-09.

i) I agree with McGrew that Hume was wrong. However, it seems to me that in this instance, his objection to Van Til rests on a misinterpretation of Van Til. At least to judge by what he quoted, Van Til isn't making a statement about empiricism in general or empiricism per se, but naturalistic empiricism, which reduces everything to contingency. Van Til is remarking on what happens when you take empiricism to a logical extreme after denying the Creator.

ii) In addition, although I myself affirm sense knowledge, it's dubious whether sensory perception alone is an adequate basis of knowledge. I think sense knowledge has to be supplemented.

McGrew continues:

> When someone starts out on the wrong foot, as I believe Van Til has done by his concessions to Hume, it is not surprising that problems tend to resurface throughout his philosophical system. To pick just one illustration, Oliphint quotes with apparent approval Van Tils' criticism of the non-Christian for whom
>
> > the law of contradiction is, like all other laws, something that does not find its ultimate source in the creative activity of God.

> I find this sort of radical logical positivism unintelligible. I have no idea what it would even mean for what is logically possible and impossible to be the result of a creative act of God; the very notion of action seems to presuppose distinctions between actor and action that are intelligible only in terms of fundamental principles of logic. Ibid. 109-110.

Here McGrew seems to be on firmer ground. Van Til's statement about logic, in the passage quoted, does indeed appear to be nonsensical.

McGrew goes on to say:

> It is painful to have to point out things like this, since Van Til has inspired so many ardent and loyal disciples. But in my view, deep problems pervade almost every aspect of Van Til's thought–his epistemology, his history of philosophy, his description of the position of non-Christians, and his exegesis of Scripture. It is my considered opinion that there is no point in trying to correct his system pice by piece. One must simply start over on very different principles. Ibid. 110.

Whether that's true or false would depend on McGrew successfully elaborating his allegations. I myself use different philosophers for different spare parts.

McGrew has his own package. I don't think we have to take it or leave it. We can disassemble the package and select some choice spare parts which we combine with spare parts from other thinkers.

Four Views on Christianity and Philosophy

I'm going to make some scattered comments on P. Gould & R. Davis, eds., **Four Views on Christianity and Philosophy** (Zondervan, 2016).

1. The contributors are Graham Oppy, Scott Oliphint, Timothy McGrew, and Paul Moser.

I've already done some posts on related topics, which I will link to at the end of this post.

It's unclear to me what the editors' selection criteria were. If you want a spokesman for atheism, Oppy is a good pick. He's probably the top atheist philosopher of his generation.

If you want spokesman for evidentialism, you can't do better than Timothy McGrew.

However, Paul Moser is overrated. If the point was to have someone who represents a more existential or illative perspective, that emphasizes direct religious experience rather than formal arguments and empirical evidence, then C. Stephen Evans or Kai-man Kwan would be much better picks for that niche.

Which niche was Oliphint chosen for? To represent Calvinism, presuppositionalism, or both? If Reformed presuppositionalism in particular, then either Vern Poythress or James Anderson would be far more competent exponents. If Calvinism in general, then Greg Welty, William Davis, or Jeremy Pierce would be far more competent exponents. (That's assuming Davis is not a

presuppositionalist. I don't know his position on that one way or the other.)

There are many other Christian philosophers who might have interesting things to say about the relationship between Christianity and philosophy, viz. Robert Adams, Michael Almeida, Oliver Crisp, George Mavrodes, Alexander Pruss, Del Ratzsch, Nicholas Rescher, Eleonore Stump, Antony Thiselton, Kevin Vanhoozer, Peter van Inwagen, Merold Westphal, Edward Wierenga, Stephen Wykstra, Keith Yandell.

Perhaps, though, the editors felt that would be too idiosyncratic. Maybe they wanted to represent particular schools of thought. If so, why wasn't Thomism included? Mind you, I think Thomism is overrated, so I don't lament its omission, but I'm puzzled by the selection criteria.

Likewise, Augustinianism has a distinctive position on religious epistemology.

2. I don't have much more to say about Oppy than I've already said. He's super-smart. However, he's dumb about the ultimate stakes in the debate over atheism and Christianity. Moreover, he has a kind of armchair intelligence that's more at home with abstractions. He's impatient with the nitty-gritty of sifting historical evidence.

3. I bought the book for McGrew's contribution, and I wasn't disappointed. It's nice to have one place where he pulls together the various strands of his case for Christianity. Of course, due to space constraints, there's a loss of detail. To see how he fleshes out the argument, you have to consult his other publications. But it's good to see the overall argument.

Due to the publication date, he wasn't able to mention that Lydia McGrew has a book on undesigned coincidences in the pipeline. That will be a significant supplement.

There's little to criticize, and much to admire, in McGrew's presentation. He has a section on justification and warrant, in which he promotes internalism–in opposition to Plantinga's externalism. That might be the most controversial section.

That's followed by a section on natural theology. I agree with him that Rom 1 refers to external evidence, and not an inborn faculty.

In the same section he outlines some theistic proofs. In particular, the kalam cosmological argument, the moral argument, and the argument from consciousness. There are, of course, many additional arguments one could adduce.

In the next section he addresses the problem of evil. He sketches a greater good defense:

> First, some evils must be allowed as a consequence of allowing certain goods…Second, some evils are necessary for good consequences to come…God is able to prevent any evil that he has not already determined must be permitted for the sake of a greater good. But it would be inconsistent to demand that God both permit and prevent the same evil (138).

At one point he seems to borrow a page from skeptical theism:

> We should admit that we do not know God's reasons for permitting many particular evils. But the reasons for particular evils are precisely what we would not expect to know, if there were a God (139).

On the same page, he mentions the fall, and redemptive suffering. Within that framework, evil is not unexpected, but expected.

However, an atheist might counter that his appeal is circular, inasmuch as the fall and redemptive suffering are, of themselves, evils that require justification, rather than a justification for the existence of evil.

Perhaps, though, that objection is undercut by McGrew's later observation that

> In a purely material universe of the sort that philosophical naturalism offers us, there is no room for objective right and wrong. There is nothing tragic about the suffering of the innocent, nothing noble about Mother Teresa or Lillian Doerksen or Raoul Wallenberg (140).

I basically agree. There is, however, another sense in which the outlook of atheism is unmitigated tragedy. That's reflected in antinatalism. Better never to be born in the first place.

On the same page, McGrew says

> It is not necessary for a sincere and rational believer to deny that evil–whether particular evils or the distressing fact of the wide scope of some sorts of evil–counts as evidence against the existence of God.

He's making the point that it's rational to affirm a position "despite the existence of some counterevidence". I agree.

However, it's unclear why evil would count as even prima facie evidence against God's existence. On the previous page, McGrew contrasts Judeo-Christian theism with a "generic benevolent theism". But in what respect is the existence of evil even prima facie inconsistent with Judeo-Christian theism? The Bible is a chronicle of evil. And not just Bible history, but futuristic prophecies. So that doesn't seem to be internally at odds with Judeo-Christian theism.

Rather, the argument from evil usually posits an inconsistent triad of abstract divine attributes (omniscience, omnipotence, benevolence). Yet that's the kind of "generic benevolent theism" which McGrew rejected as misleading frame of reference.

In the next section he summarizes several different lines of evidence for the historicity of the Gospels. In addition, he offers some trenchant criticisms of Bart Erhman's list of alleged contradictions in the Gospels. It would be nice to see McGrew address this at length.

In the next section he corrects a classic uncomprehending objection to miracles. In addition, he proposes some criteria for sifting miraculous claims.

The sequence of sections isn't random. Rather, they are ordered to present a multistage argument or cumulative case for Christianity.

In addition to the exposition of his own position, McGrew has a useful rejoinder to criticisms, as well as useful responses to essays by other contributors.

4. In criticizing Oliphint's position, McGrew says:

> The principia essence of most disciplines, from astronomy to theology, are not indemonstrable, immediately evident, and so forth–they are almost invariably the conclusions of chains of reasoning, some of them rather recondite (107).

I think that misinterprets Oliphint's position. Although he doesn't use this terminology, I think Oliphint implicitly distinguishes between discipline-specific first principles and discipline-universal first principles. Between principles that are distinctive to particular disciplines (e.g. astronomy, biology) and theological principles that underly every other discipline. Assuming that's correct, Oliphint wouldn't insist that the first principles of astronomy are indemonstrable, indubitable, immediately evident, in the sense of first principles distinctive to astronomy–in contrast to the theological first principles that undergird it. McGrew might still take issue with that, but it relocates the objection.

5. McGrew and Oliphint got into a wrangle about whether there are "neutral" criteria. That's an old bone of contention between evidentialism and Van Tilian presuppositionalism. I think that's a bad way to frame the issue. "Neutral" isn't clear or useful. I'd recast the issue in these terms:

i) Christians should use *good* criteria. Criteria which help us to distinguish between true and false claims.

ii) These are criteria which *reasonable* people can agree on.

Now, someone might object that my definitions begs the question. Who decides what makes a criterion good? Who decides what makes a person reasonable? Don't Christians and atheists differ with each other on these very issues?

But that's unavoidable. There are no criteria that everyone or even most folks will agree on. The best a Christian can do is to state and defend his criteria. Explain why these are good criteria. The acceptance or rejection of criteria is person-variable. Constructive dialogue is only possible if both sides share enough in common. It isn't possible to secure uniformity. As Oliphint rightly says:

> As with Ehrman, so also with interpretations of data and history, it is bias at the beginning that will go a long way toward determining the conclusions (160).

That, however, needs to be counterbalanced by McGrew's observation that:

> It is both injurious and counterproductive to assume, without very strong reasons, that someone who is apparently seeking the truth is in fact implacably opposed to finding it…Some people, by God's grace, approach the question of the truth of Christianity with a genuine desire to know whether it is true, a willingness to believe it if it is, and an expectation that the evidence, properly sifted and weighed, will tell them where the truth lies (174).

6. Then we have Oliphint's presentation. To some extent I'm sympathetic to what Oliphint is attempting to do, but he doesn't know how to frame the issues properly, much less argue for his claims.

i) He devotes an inordinate amount of time to expounding the *principium essendi* and the *principium cognoscendi*. The basic point I take him to be making is that God is the

fundamental source of whatever exists, while revelation is the fundamental source and standard of knowledge.

That could be a promising framework. Problem is, Oliphint spends a lot of time asserting rather than arguing his case. He could summarize his position in a few sentences, then present supporting arguments or argumentative strategies in defense of his claim. Instead, the reader is treated to lengthy, repetitive assertions. Oliphint never gets around to giving the reader reasons to agree with him. It's just a lot of padding.

On a minor point, the constant use of the Latin terms is pretentious and distracting. Why not use English synonyms?

ii) Oliphint says the principia must be known

> as both immediate and indemonstrable..a principium is not proven by way of syllogism but is such that it proves the ground upon which any other fact or demonstration depends. It is, in that sense, a transcendental notion…theology's principia undergird and underlie any and all other principia…the principia of theology come–as if were–from the outside, in. They come from a transcendent source and are not generated within the discipline itself…First principles, therefore, cannot be something that someone demonstrates as a result of one's reasoning or argument…So the principia that form the foundation for everything else are themselves transcendental in nature. That is, they provide for the possibility of anything else (74-74).

Several problems with this claim:

a) *Everything* that's not God ultimately comes from the outside–from the Creator's hand. So that's not unique to the first principles.

b) It blurs the distinction between something that's ontologically transcendent and something that's epistemologically transcendental. Oliphint is sliding back and forth between the transcendent existence of God–transcendent in relation to creation–and a transcendental argument. But those are not equivalent notions. The former is a metaphysical category and metaphysical distinction while the latter is a type of argument.

c) He fails to distinguish between what's directly demonstrable and what's indirectly demonstrable. If reason can't show that first principles are true, then what evidence is there that the purported first principles are, in fact, true? What basis is there to credit Oliphant's claim?

d) In the nature of the case, a transcendental argument does attempt to make a logical case for x as a necessary condition for the possibility of y. Otherwise, it would not be an *argument*.

e) Perhaps, though, he takes the first principles to be self-evident or "indubitable" (93n19). Maybe he means "immediate" in *that* sense. But to assert that the theological principia are self-evident or indubitable is, in itself, a claim. And that's certainly not a claim which people generally regard as indubitably or self-evidently the case. Indeed, there are Christian philosophers like Timothy McGrew and Christian theologians like Benjamin Warfield who just don't see it that way. To some degree, Oliphint seems to be treating Christian theology as a Cartesian axiomatic system.

7. Oliphint says

> We know God properly by his revelation, and he know his revelation by knowing him properly (77).

That has a catchy, quotable symmetry, but what does it even mean? The second clause appears to retract the first clause. The second clause suggests we know God apart from revelation. Do we have direct knowledge of God, independent of revelation? If so, where does that leave the first clause? If not, what's the logical relationship between the two clauses?

8. Oliphint says

> It is this notion of God as a revealing God that constitutes what is meant by covenant (77).

Surely that's a grossly simplistic definition. At best, it might be a necessary condition or constituent of a divine covenant. But there's much more to the definition of a covenant than the bare notion of God as a revealing God.

9. Oliphint says:

> To be the image of God, therefore, human beings must be in a relationship to the God who made them. That relationship can be denominated as "covenant" (77).

What makes that relationship a distinctively covenantal relationship? Does Oliphint mean that to be a creature is to be in covenant with God by virtue of one's creatureliness? Are stars in covenant with God? Are crabs in covenant with God?

10. In addition, Oliphint attempts to get a lot of mileage from the concept of the imago Dei. Problem is, he doesn't exegete his concept from Scripture. Rather, he seems to use the "image" as a cipher for his theological assumptions.

11. Oliphint says

> We recognize that the one God–Father, Son, and Holy Spirit–is absolutely independent in and of himself; he is "I Am Who I Am" (Exod 3:14) [81].

Although I agree with Oliphint on God's aseity and impassibility, you can't prooftext that from Exod 3:14. I know Aquinas thought so, but it's not even clear how the Hebrew should be rendered. The phrase is enigmatic.

12. Oliphint says:

> The assertion of the principal authority of Scripture does not give license to a bare and naked affirmation with no arguments to testify to its authority (120).

That's a promising admission from an apologetic standpoint. It is, however, profoundly unclear how that admission is coherent with Oliphint's other claim that as a theological principium or first principle, Scripture is "indemonstrable," can't "be proven by way of syllogism," "cannot be something that someone demonstrates as a result of one's reasoning or argument".

13. Oliphint says:

> The notion that mind came from non-mind, not matter how often repeated, is inconceivable; there are no data to show how such a thing could happen (51).

> How could it be, we could ask, that someone could seriously assert that the natural is able to account for itself? (121).
> But what are the criteria by which this "sound" historical investigation takes place or by which we might measure such "experience"? (160).

Those are good observations. Those are good starting-points for further discussion. Unfortunately, Oliphint's position precludes him from developing these programmatic observations since his first principles are taken to be "indubitable" and "indemonstrable" from the get-go. So his observations are stillborn.

14. Oliphint says:

> Ehrman's problems with Scripture stem not from the text of Scripture–the data of Scripture–but from his initial rejection of it as the Word of God (160).

Having read Ehman's **Jesus Interrupted**, as well as having listened to some of his debates, Oliphint's characterization seems to be an a priori claim that's not derived from Ehrman's public statements. From what I've read and seen, Ehrman operates with a Harold Lindsell model of inerrancy in which, for Scripture to be inerrant or factual accurate, biblical accounts must be like videotape and audiotape. Given that unreasonable standard of comparison, his problems stem from the disconnect between the text or data of Scripture and his false expectations regarding what inerrant or factually accurate reportage requires.

I'm afraid that picking Oliphint was a wasted opportunity.

Supplementary posts:

http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2016/09/miracles-and-urban-legends.html

http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2016/09/oppy-on-supernatural-encounters.html

http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2016/09/armchair-debunkers.html

http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2016/09/mcgrew-on-van-til.html

http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2016/09/apologetic-methodology-revisited.html

http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2016/08/ten-problems-with-presuppositionalism.html

Reviewing reviews of the Licona/Dillahunty debate

I'd like to make a few more observations about James White's review of the Licona/Dillahunty debate. That's because his review goes to the question of how to interpret presuppositionalism and differentiate presupositionalism from evidentialism. White was actually siding with the atheist by saying that in some of his exchanges with Licona, Dillahunty was "knocking the ball out of the park".

1. It isn't clear what White's position is on the occult and the paranormal. Does he deny the occurrence of non-Christian miracles (and other suchlike)? Licona wasn't appealing to that evidence to adjudicate rival religious claims, but to adjudicate the contrast between naturalism and supernaturalism. White doesn't appear to grasp the actual state of the argument.

Likewise, we need to be clear on what certain phenomena attest. If, say, some modern-day exorcisms prove the existence of demons, that doesn't mean you should become a devil-worshipper. If, say, some modern-day cases of witchcraft prove the power of sorcery, that doesn't mean you could become a Satanist. Where do I sign up? Corroborative evidence for the dark side doesn't attest it in the sense that you ought join the dark side. A validation is not necessarily a recommendation.

2. White faulted Licona for failing to challenge Dillahunty's creatureliness. He said Licona granted that Dillahunty has the right to judge God. Granted the grounds. White said Licona failed to point out that atheists like Dillahunty don't have the right to make such determinations. They have no

basis for their reasons. White appealed to Rom 1. This raises a number of distinct issues:

i) In a debate over the existence of God, or some related issue, a Christian apologist can't directly appeal to divine authority for the obvious reason that God's existence is the very question at issue. In a debate with an atheist over God's existence (or some related issue), a Christian apologist is assuming a burden of proof for the sake of argument. And at that stage of the argument, God's existence has yet to be established, so it would be premature and question-begging to cite divine authority at that preliminary stage of the argument. God's existence is the conclusion of the argument.

This doesn't mean the onus is on the Christian. Both sides have a burden of proof in that format.

ii) That said, a Christian can certainly challenge the atheist's moral authority. Indeed, many secular thinkers concede that naturalism cannot justify moral realism.

iii) In addition, this was in reference to Dillahunty's allusion to the argument from divine hiddenness. That, however, is not a case of the atheist standing in judgment over God. Rather, divine hiddenness argument proposes to be an internal critique of Christianity. It alleges that Christian theology is inconsistent, for if God wants everyone to believe in him, he could make himself more evident to everyone.

iv) There are, of course, ways to counter the divine hiddenness argument. Dillahunty was begging the question by asserting that the evidence for the Resurrection is insufficient.

v) Moreover, as White correctly observed, the divine hiddenness argument is premised on assumptions specific to freewill theism rather than Calvinism. Therefore, it has no purchase on Calvinism.

vi) Finally, this was just a diversionary tactic on Dillahunty's part. Instead of directly engaging the evidence adduced by Licona, Dillahunty deflects attention away from that issue by changing the subject. But the divine hiddenness argument is not a refutation of Licona's specific evidence for the Resurrection, or for the supernatural. So that's just a decoy.

3. White acts as though Licona's appeal to paranormal phenomena was meant to be direct evidence for the Resurrection. Does White fail to grasp the fact that Licona is mounting a two-stage argument? The purpose of his appeal to evidence for supernaturalism is not to directly prove the Resurrection, but to establish the possibility of the Resurrection, by ruling out naturalism.

4. White objected to Licona's appeal to probabilities. White said that when the Apostles preach the Resurrection, they treat that event, not as merely probable, but absolutely established. But this, again, raises a number of distinct issues:

i) In general, there's often a difference between what can be known and what can be proved. There are many situations in which what we can demonstrate falls short of what we know to be the case. Put another way, there's an elementary distinction between being justified in what you believe and being able to justify what you believe.

For instance, I have many memories of now-deceased relatives. I know I had those conversations. I know we did

those things. But I have no corroborative evidence. Memories are all that's left.

ii) In addition, this runs deeper than apologetic methodology. It concerns epistemology. There are competing theories about knowledge and justified belief. For instance, there's a Puritan paradigm, exemplified by John Owen and the Westminster Divines, according to which it's possible for Christians to attain "infallible" assurance regarding the veracity of the Christian faith. On the other hand, there's a moderate Anglican paradigm, exemplified by John Locke and Bishop Butler, which stresses probability rather than certainty. Having "reasonable" grounds for what we believe. You have Augustine's divine illumination model, Pascal's "the heart has reasons which reason knows nothing of," the Thomistic dichotomy between demonstrable truths and articles of faith, Newman's illative sense. And so on and so forth. There are many divergent models regarding the relationship between faith and reason.

Licona himself is on record admitting that he periodically struggles with doubts about the truth of Christianity. So for him, it's not so much about apologetic method or philosophy, but his personal frame of reference. In his case, that's unfortunate.

5. White noted that the way Dilluhunty frames the divine hiddenness argument seems to be influenced by Molinism, with its gallery of possible worlds. White countered that God is not a cosmic card dealer.

I agree. I'd note, however, that modal metaphysics is hardly the exclusive provenance of Molinism. Calvinists can and should believe in possible worlds. But we ground these differently than Molinists.

6. White took issue with Licona's statement that we need to let the data challenge our presuppositions, challenge our current worldview. Now, it's unclear how far Licona would take that.

i) It isn't possible to suspend all your presuppositions. As an intellectual exercise, you can bracket or scrutinize some of your presuppositions. But you can't simultaneously bracket or scrutinize all your presuppositions, since you must use some beliefs as a standard of comparison to assess other beliefs. By the same token, you can't assess evidence apart from presuppositions, since evaluation requires norms. You must have rules of evidence. You must have an idea of what constitutes evidence.

ii) That said, I think the intended context of Licona's remarks concerns Dillahunty's methodological atheism. He resorts to methodological atheism as a filter to screen out any and all lines of evidence that disconfirm atheism. As a result, Dillahunty is a secular fideist.

iii) That brings us to the point that while presuppositions are unavoidable, not all presuppositions are justified. Some presuppositions are ad hoc or intellectually evasive.

7. White accused Licona of adopting a "naturalistic, materialistic" historiography by appealing to the paranormal. But that's a complete misrepresentation of Licona's argument. Licona's appeal is the polar opposite: he is citing that kind of evidence to debunk naturalism and physicalism.

Likewise, White completely missed the point of Licona's example about bridge hands. This goes to the question of prior probabilities. What are the odds that you will be dealt a winning bridge hand like that? Licona's point is that even

though there's the outside chance, an abstract mathematically possibility, that something that astronomically unlikely will happen at random, that's not the first explanation we reach for. Rather, we suspect cheating. The deck was stacked. And Licona is using that as an analogy for the Resurrection.

8. White condemned Licona for saying his argument wasn't predicated on God's existence. But that objection is confused.

i) To begin with, there's a logical difference between a premise and a presupposition. A presupposition is not a premise of an argument.

ii) In addition, many things may be necessary for anything particular thing to be the case, but they needn't all figure in your argument. For instance, how would you prove that Lincoln was assassinated? Consider how many other facts must be true for that particular fact to be true. It happened at Ford's Theatre. Does that mean you must prove the existence of Ford's Theatre? Ford's Theater is located in Washington, DC. Does that mean you must prove the existence of Washington, DC (in the mid 19C)? Booth was the assassin. Does that mean you must prove the identity of the assassin? It happened on April 14, 1865. Does that mean you must prove the reality of time? To be shot to dead, Lincoln had to be a physical organism. Must we prove that first?

At what point do we break into the argument? We necessarily come to the claim, or come into the argument, with many presuppositions that we take for granted. But as a rule, all you need to prove Lincoln's assassination is period documentation. Testimonial evidence.

If Christianity was proven false, would you believe?

There's a video clip floating around the internet in which Frank Turek is asked whether he'd continue to be a Christian if the Christian faith was proven false. Here's one link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHodZLFtxgw

i) Up to a point, Turek gives a good answer. For instance, you have theological liberals who say their "Christian faith" is independent of past or future events. Their faith doesn't hinge on the Resurrection, or physical return of Christ, or historicity of the Exodus, or call of Abraham, or Noah's flood, or special creation of Adam and Eve. They treat all these accounts as parables.

Over against that dehistoricized, hallowed out Christianity, it is important to say, in a qualified sense (see below), that in principle, Christianity is falsifiable.

ii) Ironically, there are some evangelical apologists whose position differs from the theological liberals as a matter of degree rather than kind. They stake everything on the Resurrection. They are prepared to consign other biblical accounts to the status of fiction so long as they have the Resurrection.

iii) There's a certain paradox about evidence-based beliefs. On the one hand, if a professing Christian lacks articulate reasons to defend his faith, then when he encounters prima facie evidence that disproves one or more Christian essentials, he may be unable to put up an effective

resistance to the challenge. That leaves his faith very fragile. An accident waiting to happen. In that regard, faith without evidence is unstable.

iv) On the other hand, evidence-based beliefs can be unstable. If the ground shifts from under what he took to be solid evidence for his faith, then that may rock his faith. If his faith is only as good as the state of the evidence, and someone challenges the evidential foundation, or marshals prima facie evidence to the contrary, then his faith may be shaken. So that would seem to make Christian faith inherently provisional.

What if someone raises an impressive sounding objection to which he has no good answer? There may be good answers, but if he doesn't know enough to know where to find them, where does that leave him? Therein lies value in the witness of the Spirit:

http://www.proginosko.com/2017/01/the-internal-testimony-of-the-holy-spirit/

v) In this respect it's important to distinguish between actual evidence and prima facie evidence. It would certainly be foolish to abandon your faith just because you encounter some challenging issues. And this isn't confined to Christian philosophy. Suppose I can't prove that I'm not trapped in the Matrix. Is that a reason for me to seriously doubt the external world?

vi) It can be misleading to quote Paul's statement about how our faith is vain unless Jesus rose from the dead. Paul isn't suggesting that the Resurrection is up for grabs. Just the opposite: Paul is appealing to the fact of the Resurrection as an unquestionable standard of comparison: Given the Resurrection, if the belief or practice of

Corinthians Christians is at odds with the truth of the Resurrection, then it's incumbent on them to bring their beliefs or behavior in line with the Resurrection. Paul's hypothetical is an argument ad impossibile.

vii) In addition, we can say that Christianity is falsifiable, considered in isolation. If the tomb wasn't empty on the first Easter, and you keep the rest of your belief structure intact, then you can say that falsifies Christianity. However, that artificially compartmentalizes one truth from other truths.

The question is deceptively simple. Suppose we recast it in terms of theism generally rather than Christianity in particular. If theism is proven false, would you continue to believe it? The problem is that such a question assumes that truth is independent of God's existence. But what if truth is dependent on God's existence? Then at least some version of theism would have to be true for anything else to be true. And is there a version of theism with better evidential credentials than Christianity?

viii) This goes to the question: what is truth? It goes to the question of truth-conditions and truthmakers. There are different theories of truth.

Suppose we define truth as a true proposition. But that pushes the question back a step. What are propositions? In what, if anything, do they inhere? Are propositions mental entities? Abstract objects? A physicalist rejects abstract objects.

Or suppose we define truth as a property of beliefs: a true belief. But that's a mental state. And there are problems with that definition according to the standard secular paradigm. If that's confined to human mental states, what's

the standard of comparison? What makes one person's mental state true and another false?

And here's another problem: if truth is a relation between belief and a corresponding truthmaker, there are no truths unless there are minds to think them. But according to naturalistic evolution, for the first 13+ billion years of the universe, there were no minds, no brains of sufficient complexity to entertain true beliefs. But in that event, it wasn't true, at the time, that flora antedate fauna, since nothing back then was capable of entertaining that belief.

This reflects the superficiality of evidentialism. It's useful up to a point, but it needs to be undergirded by transcendental theism.

Rationalists and mystery-mongers

Recently, I had some exchanges on Facebook regarding presuppositionalism:

1. Jonathan McLatchie
What is the trouble with the presuppositionalist school of apologetics? The presuppositionalist argues that Christianity is the only self-consistent worldview, and thus on that basis one is rationally warranted in taking it to be axiomatic -- thus, the presuppositionalist argues, it is impossible that Christianity is false because no other worldview is self-consistent. My beef with this view is at least two fold. First, coherence is not the only test of truth (indeed, there are many propositions which are self-consistent and yet false). There is also the correspondence test for truth -- in other words, does the proposition correspond to reality? Second, while I think a decent argument can be marshalled for asserting that theistic belief is axiomatic to the presumption of the rational intelligibility of the Universe, and indeed reason itself, it is not at all clear to me that the same is true of belief in the Bible as God's revealed Word. I fail to see any logical contradiction that is entailed by asserting that the Biblical worldview is false. That is why, in my opinion, evidentialism is far more satisfying as an apologetic approach.

Hays
Several distinctions are in order:

i) There's a difference between Clarkian presuppositionalism and Van Tilian presuppositionalism. Clark and Van Till represent opposing extremes. Clark is a rationalist while Van Til is a mystery-monger. I think Clark's

rationalism is sometimes simplistic while Van Til is often gratuitously paradoxical.

Clark's epistemology is more Augustinian while Van Til's epistemology is more like a Reformed version of transcendental Thomism.

ii) The Clarkian version is axiomatic and espouses the coherence theory of truth.

One problem is that Gordon Clark had no real successors. There are some efforts to improve on his approach. To my knowledge, Ryan Hedrick is the most promising candidate to develop Clarkian presuppositionalism. But that remains at a programmatic stage.

iii) Van Til was a big picture thinker who didn't excel at detailed formulations. And he's binary to a fault.

Van Til's two leading, immediate successors were Greg Bahnsen and John Frame, both of whom diverge from Van Til in some respects.

iv) At present, the most astute Van Tililian apologist is probably James N. Anderson, although Vern Poythress also does some really fine work in apologetics.

v) The "logical contradiction that's entailed by asserting that the Biblical worldview is false" is the claim that God himself is the source and standard of logic and human rationality.

2. Suppose we take the crudest version of evidentialism, which would be akin to historical positivism. "Just the facts!"

Now when an evidentialist of that stripe tries to proves Christianity by appeal to the basic reliability of the Gospels, a halfway intelligent atheist will invoke Hume's argument for the presumption against miracles. Typically, an atheist will say that any naturalistic explanation, however implausible, is more plausible than a supernatural explanation.

That's why sophisticated evidentialists like Swinburne and the McGrews present a philosophical justification for the possibility and credibility of miracles. They do so to lay the groundwork for evidentialism.

By the same token, a key issue in the debate over ID theory is whether methodological atheism is a sine qua non of true scientific explanation. That's why Stephen Meyer and Bill Dembski, as well as sympathetic referees like Plantinga and Del Ratzsch, criticize methodological atheism.

Likewise, secularism is unable to justify induction and inductive logic. Or the first instance.

By contrast, as James Anderson pointed out some years ago, a doctrine of providentially preserved natural kind is able to ground induction.

On a related note are cliches about value-laden nature of observation, and the realist/antirealist debate over the philosophy of science.

These are examples of presuppositional issues in apologetics and related disciplines. So this is a crucial area in which evidential apologetics and Van Tilian apologetics overlap.

vi) That said, there's no doubt that much of the best work in contemporary Christian apologetic is hailing from the evidentialist camp.

3. Actually, the hardest things to prove can be obvious or fundamental things. That's because we use obvious or fundamental things to prove less obvious or less fundamental things. But once we hit bedrock, it's hard to directly prove what's intellectually bedrock. At that point the most promising line of argument is transcendental reasoning.

There are certain beliefs we don't normally attempt prove, such as the existence of other minds, an external world, or sense knowledge. And it's difficult, if not impossible, to prove them directly. Rather, we use these them to prove other things. And, in a roundabout way, that's the best way to prove these beliefs. We can't do without them. To deny them means to deny too many other things. Belief in God often operates at the same fundamental level.

Mind you, there can be more direct lines of evidence for God (e.g. miracles, answered prayer).

To take an example, W. V. Quine was the top secular philosopher of his generation. Labored to formulate a systematically naturalistic epistemology and ontology.

He started out as a mathematician. His initial reputation derived from his work on mathematical logic. However, as a consistent atheist, he denied logical necessity. That didn't fit into physicalism. He did admit to being a "reluctant platonist" to accommodate the higher ranges of set theory.

So, from a secular perspective, what is logic? Is logic just how human brains think (assuming brains do the thinking)?

If so, what's the standard of comparison? What makes one brain logical and another brain illogical? If logic isn't independent of brains, then what's the basis for saying someone used a logical fallacy? Logic is nothing over and above how brains operate. Whose brain is the benchmark?

By contrast, Christian philosophers like Greg Welty and James Anderson have argued that abstract objects like logic are constituted by the infinite, timeless mind of God. That grounds logic in a way that naturalism/physicalism cannot.

4. Regarding Josh Parikh's infinite regress objection to Sye's brand of presuppositionalism, I think part of the problem may be Sye's equivocal, slipshod terminology about "making sense of X". Suppose we recast the issue using epistemic justification lingo. Suppose we then draw the following distinction. A belief can be justified in two different senses:

i) A person's state of belief may be justified or justifiable

ii) Providing a philosophical justification for a belief

If we're using "justified" in the sense of (ii), and if someone must presuppose Christian theism in that sense to be justified (="make sense of"), then that may well generate Josh's infinite regress. You can never get started if you must provide a preliminary philosophical justification for everything you say or believe. For every claim you make will then be unjustified absent a prior justification. In other words, if you're providing a justification for X, but the justification you provide requires a justification in its own right. I think that's the kind of regress that Josh is angling at.

One way to sidestep that deadlock is appeal to (i). We can begin in a state of justified belief. That psychological state may in turn be amenable to philosophical justification, so we can take it a step further. A justified belief in the sense of (i) can be subject to additional analysis and philosophical justification. To have a justified belief in the sense of (i) is the starting-point for having a justified belief in the sense of (ii).

So, for instance, a young child is justified in the sense of (i) in believing that he knows his mother by sight and his mother loves him.

And in principle, that might be justifiable in the sense of (ii) through corroborative evidence.

By analogy, unbelievers can hold many justified beliefs in the sense of (i) even if their atheism implicitly undermines those beliefs. Given atheism, they can't justify their beliefs in the sense of (ii), even though some of their beliefs are justified or justifiable in the sense of (i).

Josh may or may not agree with me, but it's an attempt to disambiguate the issue.

i) One issue is that you have different religious epistemologies which intersect with different apologetic methodologies. although the fit is sometimes adventitious.

For instance, there's the infallibilist tradition of the Westminster Confession, where a Christian can attain "infallible assurance" of the faith.

Towards the opposite end of the spectrum are apologists who consider dialogue with atheists to be genuinely open-ended. It could go either way.

These are deeper differences than apologetic method. And it often has a lot to do with the personal experience of individual apologists.

ii) A problem with Van Tilian apologetics is a shallow talent pool. Much shallower than the available pool for classical and evidential apologetics. A lot of what passes for Van Tilian apologetics doesn't get beyond the level of slogans.

On a related note is Sye ten Bruggencate, who has quite a following among people with low philosophical standards (to put it kindly).

iii) One further problem is a bad development within Van Tilian apologetics, where Oliphint, Nate Shannon, Dolezal, and even Poythress (who's head and shoulders above the other three) are on the warpath when it comes to univocity. That's a dead-end.

5. Sye Ten Bruggencate
They are indeed without excuse because the HAVE the evidence, so why are you giving them evidence when Scripture says they already have enough?

Hays
i) Enough for what? Enough to be culpable?

ii) Having enough evidence to know that God exists isn't the same thing as having enough evidence to know that Christianity is true. Assuming Rom 1 teaches that people generally have natural knowledge of God, it doesn't follow that people have natural knowledge of Christianity, for that is based on historical knowledge, and not something intuitive, innate, or inferable from reason or nature.

iii) There's a distinction between tacit knowledge and conscious knowledge. For instance, people of normal intelligence have a prereflective knowledge of informal logic and math (i.e. how to count).

But that tacit knowledge can be further developed through analysis.

iv) People can have enough evidence for something, but be in denial. As such, there are situations in which it's useful to present additional information to make their denial untenable.

Sye
I don't have any evidence that people have been saved by evidence.

Hays
It's unclear what that's even supposed to mean.

Sye
Give me one example where evidence was presented by Jesus and Paul for the existence of God. Just one please.

Hays
i) Of course, Jesus and Paul were typically dealing with Jewish theists or pagan polytheists.

ii) In addition, we need to guard against caricaturing sola Scriptura. Sola scripture doesn't mean the Bible is an encyclopedia. Many things are true that fall outside the purview of Scripture. The fact that you can't find something in Scripture doesn't ipso facto mean it's false or unwarranted.

Sye

Please show from Scripture that the 'atheist' does not believe in God. Thanks.

Hays
There's a potential distinction between knowing something and believing something. A wife may suspect that her husband is cheating on her. There's telltale evidence. But she refuses to believe it.

Sye
How about explain how you can make sense of ANYTHING without presupposing Christian Theism, thanks.

Hays
What does Sye mean by "making sense of x"? Seems to be a basic equivocation here. Surely it's possible to understand a sentence without presupposing Christian theism. You can "make sense of" what a sentence means without presupposing Christian theism.

So does Sye really mean something like you can't justify any of your beliefs without presupposing Christian theism?

Sye
How about you just tell us ONE thing you know without presupposing Christian theism and how YOU know it? Thanks.

Hays
What about a young child who knows the sound of his father's voice or recognizes his mother's face?

Sye
So you know something for certain, because it is not doubtable? is that your claim?

Josh used an example of a self-presenting state: pain. I can't be mistaken about feeling pain. I can be mistaken about the source of pain, but not pain itself.

BTW, this goes to the question of whether all knowledge is propositional.

6. Kelly K Klein
Wow, so that's it, it just seems to be the best explanation for you, I guess until someone convinces you to the contrary. You make your reason and acceptance the standards by which you determine God might exist?

Hays
i) Well, there's an obvious sense in which every Christian must rely on his own reason regarding what seems to be true to him. What's the alternative? Your mind is the instrument by which you apprehend truth and falsehood. It's not as if you can climb out of your own skin and see things from a vantage-point independent of your own mind.

ii) There's an important distinction between knowledge and proof. It's possible to know things we can't prove. Indeed, that's commonplace. Take memory. We can know that something happened because we remember it happening, even though, in many cases, we may have no supporting evidence over and above our memories.

iii) There's a distinction between what I can know and what I can prove to someone else.

Klein
Why do you claim to be a Christian, is it because to you at the moment it just makes the most sense?

Hays
From a Reformed standpoint, it's ultimately up to God to conserve the faith of the elect.

Klein
But to others it doesn't make the most sense, so who is correct, according to you no one really knows.

Hays
There's a difference between mere belief and belief that's rationally defensible. Notice what a poor job the atheists on these comment threads do at defending their beliefs. Notice how often they resort to sheer assertions and diversionary tactics.

I listened to the Sproul/Bahnsen debate years ago. Sproul is a popularizer. Spreads himself very thin. He's hardly the most able exponent of classical apologetics. Bahnsen is more competent. But in that debate Bahnsen repeatedly committed the semantic fallacy of supposing you can infer a concept of knowledge from quoting a Greek word that's translated "knowledge".

Bulkheads

Lydia McGrew recently did a webinar, hosted by Jonathan McLatchie:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9fUKdpPl6k&feature=youtu.be

I agree with most of what she said. And I commend the presentation to others. But I'd like to comment on some other things.

During the Q/A session, she compared a courtroom witness who makes an innocent mistake (misremembering) to a witness who lies. Which witness would be more credible? That's a valid distinction.

She mentioned someone who felt the McGrews emphasis on the human characteristics of Scripture was incompatible with divine inspiration. I'd just point out that according to the organic theory of inspiration, championed by Warfield, which is the standard paradigm in Baptist and Presbyterian inerrantist circles, human characteristics are not incompatible with the plenary inspiration of Scripture.

She said she doesn't have worked out theory of inspiration. She approaches Scripture as a historian rather than theologian. Approaches Scripture as historical source material rather than a religious authority. Her methodology is inductive rather than a priori. The "nitty-gritty ground level". "What do we appear to have?"

This raises a number of familiar issues. It goes back to old debates over the proper starting point when we formulate a theory of inspiration. Do we begin with the "phenomena" of

Scripture? It also goes to methodological differences between evidential and presuppositional apologetics.

1. Let's put this in a larger context. Although some evidentialists affirm the inerrancy of Scripture, that's expendable to their theology because even if they discovered that Scripture was fallible, they have a safety net in the historical evidence and basic historical reliability of the Bible, especially the Gospels.

A pragmatic objection to rejecting the inerrancy of Scripture is that once you deny it, there's nothing to prevent free fall. So the question is whether they have a containment principle. One way some of them defend their position is to say the Bible doesn't rise or fall as a unit. Rather, some books have better evidence than others. They're independent of each other in that respect. Skepticism about the Pentateuch doesn't spill over into skepticism about the Gospels because the Pentateuch and the Gospels are not on an evidential par.

If we were using a metaphor to illustrate their orientation, we might use bulkheads. Sailors don't like to drown. As a result, they've designed vessels with bulkheads. The hull is subdivided into a series of watertight compartments so that even if the hull is punctured in one or more places, the entire hull doesn't fill with water. That contains the damage. If the hull is breached, the ship doesn't automatically sink.

Some evidentialists think their position is actually more stable than doctrinaire inerrantists. They regard commitment to inerrancy as a "house of cards". By contrast, they think they have a fallback position even if the Bible is shown to be erroneous in some respects.

2. What are we to make of that position? There's a sense in which it's preferable to have an alternative that stops short of instant apostasy if the Bible is perceived to be fallible. And in theory, it might be possible to treat books of the Bible on a case-by-case basis, depending on the particular evidence for each particular book. Kinda like a passenger train where if one car catches fire, it can be uncoupled from the other cars and left to burn without setting the entire train on fire.

3. There are, however, some serious problems with this kind of evidentialism. For one thing, many books of the Bible aren't that compartmentalized. Because the NT, including the Gospels, constantly appeals to OT validation, the veracity of the NT is inseparable from the veracity of the OT.

4. Although we can approach the Bible historically, we must also approach the Bible theologically because it claims to be a theological document as well as a historical record. The Bible doesn't simply make claims about historical events. It also makes claims about a revelatory God. A God of words as well as deeds. One of the defining features of the Judeo-Christian faith is the stress on God who speaks, in contrast to the dumb idol gods of paganism.

Not only does the God of biblical theism act in history, but he acts in people. He speaks to and through chosen agents. Which goes to another fundamental distinction: the difference between true and false prophecy. A false prophet isn't merely a prophet to makes false predictions. In principle and practice, a false prophet may make true predictions. What makes him a false prophet is that he presumes to speak on God's behalf without divine inspiration.

Even in the case of revelation that originates in dreams and visions, visionary revelation is converted into verbal revelation. That's why we have a record of visionary revelation. It had to be verbalized. Committed to writing. Adapted from a visual medium to a propositional medium.

5. Put another way, the Bible doesn't simply make claims people and events from a detached, third-person perspective. It also assumes a first-person perspective by making claims about itself. Not just what was said, but the divine speaker. It makes self-referential claims about the process of inspiration and revelation. That's essential to the identity of the Judeo-Christian faith as a revealed religion. A religion of the word. Revelatory words. Bible writers don't simply report facts, but report their religious experience, as instruments of divine disclosure. Conduits of divine communication. Depending on the genre, that's sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit. Sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious:

http://triablogue.blogspot.co.at/2014/06/plenary-verbal-inspiration.html

It's misleading to say commitment to inerrancy is a priori rather than inductive. For what we "appear to have"–the "nitty-gritty ground level"–includes the revelatory self-ascription. That lies on the face of many biblical texts. And it is, by precedent, the presupposition of other texts.

Inerrancy is not an a priori posit, like philosophical stipulations and speculations about what is fitting or unfitting for God to say, do, or permit. Inerrancy is not, in the first instance, a deduction from a theological intuition about the nature of God and God's relation to the world. Rather, the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration is as much

a part of the testimonial evidence as the historical claims. Indeed, they are intertwined:

https://frame-poythress.org/scripture-speaks-for-itself/

6. Not only is presuppositionalism more theological than evidentialism, but it's more philosophical in the sense that it rejects the coherence of an atheistic alternative. That's a wall, not a door. Atheism is not an exit, but an optical illusion (as it were). That's a door jamb painted on a way. But there's nothing outside the reality of God's world. There's nowhere else to go.

7. Randal Rauser furnishes an instructive comparison. He rejects the inerrancy of Scripture. He has a face-saving position that he euphemistically dubs the "appropriation" model of inspiration. However, Rauser's primary frame of reference is philosophical theology rather than revelation. Yet there's nothing distinctively Christian about philosophical theology divorced from Biblical revelation. At best, a generic theism about truths of reason rather than truths of fact. Necessary universal truths rather than contingent historical particulars. That nicely illustrates the hazards of a religious orientation that's not grounded in biblical revelation.

Am I a presuppositionalist?

1. Am I still a presuppositionalist after all these years? If so, what kind of presuppositionalist, and why?

It's difficult to discuss the question in separation from alternate positions since these are mutually defining to some degree. To be a presuppositionalist is not to be an evidentialist or vice versa. The distinctives of each differentiate it from the other.

But then that pushes the question back a step. What's evidentialism? Who are good representatives of evidentialism?

For instance, Tim and Lydia McGrew are among the most astute evidentialists of their generation, so that's a useful point of contrast. In this presentation:

http://apologetics315.s3.amazonaws.com/audio/lydia-mcgrew-what-evidentialism-isnt.mp3

Lydia only cites two defining tenets of evidentialism:

i) No dichotomy between faith and reason

ii) Christianity cannot be known directly, without reasons

I'm somewhat puzzled by why Lydia oversimplifies evidentialism, since that's surely a very incomplete description of evidentialism. Perhaps that's due to time-constraints in combination with the lay audience which causes her to oversimplify. I'm sure she could go several layers deep if need be.

Do those two tenets demarcate evidentialism from presuppositionalism?

2. Regarding (i), to some degree I think she's pushing back against the atheist caricature of Christian belief as fideistic. And, of course, many lay Christians are fideistic.

A presuppositionalist can and should agree with her that there's no ultimate dichotomy between faith and reason. There is, though, the venerable issue of whether there's sometimes prima facie evidence against certain aspects of the Christian faith. One way of modeling that tension is a balance where there's evidence for Christianity as well as some apparent evidence to the contrary, and when you put all that on the scales, the weight of evidence for Christianity tips the scales in favor of Christianity.

That isn't distinctive to religion. Apart from religion, many of our beliefs are a balancing act, where there may be some apparent counterevidence, and we simply hold that in tension with what we continue to believe. That's somewhat weak, and I'll have more to say about that in due course (see below).

3. Regarding (ii), I'm unclear on how Lydia distinguishes knowledge from reasons. On the one hand the *content* of the Christian faith can be known apart from reasons. You can know what Christian theology represents, you can know Christian doctrine, without having any reasons.

Perhaps Lydia is speaking in shorthand for knowing that it's *true*. If so, there are two elements: (i) knowing what it stands for, and (ii) supporting evidence.

There's an obvious sense in which most Christians lack direct knowledge of the Christian faith. That's a type of

historical knowledge. We rely on historical records (i.e. the Bible). Unlike 1C Palestinian Jews who witnessed the public ministry of Christ, our knowledge is mediated by the Biblical record. Perhaps that's part of what Lydia has in mind. If so, a presuppositionalist can and should agree with that.

4. By "reasons", she cites miraculous signs (e.g. Exod 4). However, the Bible is ambivalent about the role of miraculous signs. Take the classic:

> **29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Jn 20:29).**

Thomas had a sign. *Thomas* had reasons to believe in the form of the the Risen Jesus, standing right before him. But that's the kind of evidence most Christians don't have.

Indeed, it's not coincidental that this is the lead-in to the following conclusion:

> **30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (Jn 20:30-21).**

From the narrator perspective, the *reader's* evidence isn't miraculous signs, but his eyewitness *account*. It turns on the historical accuracy of his record.

In fairness, that could be supplemented by Jn 14:12. Although that's hyperbolic, it's the case that some Christians throughout church history do receive miraculous confirmation. So it's not confined to testimonial evidence. Yet I don't believe that Tim and Lydia McGrew have directly witnessed a miracle. So *they* don't have signs in the Exod 4 sense.

5. Although she doesn't mention it in the introduction to her presentation, another tenet of evidentialism distinguishing that position from classical apologetics is the evidentialist position that miracles can furnish direct evidence for God's existence or the supernatural. It isn't necessary to first prove God's existence before you can credit a miracle and regard that as evidence for God's activity in the world. As a presuppositionalist, I agree with that.

6. Another tenet of evidentialism that crops up in the literature is appeal to common ground. Assumptions that Christian believers and unbelievers share alike. Stock examples include beliefs and criteria like the existence of an external world and other minds, the basic reliability of the senses, the basic reliability of reason, the general uniformity of nature and induction, the correspondence theory of truth, and the role of logic. But as a presuppositionalist, I have some reservations about that appeal:

i) There's a problem when common ground is classified as beliefs or criteria that aren't Christian/theistic on the one hand or naturalistic on the other hand. But that's very artificial. Are the aforesaid assumptions independent of naturalism, theism, and Christianity? Assuming those are true beliefs and good criteria, they either obtain in a world where God exists or where God does not exist. There is no

third alternative. They can't very well obtain in a world that isn't Christian or theistic or naturalistic. Reality must match one of those options. So those assumptions can't be truly agnostic. In what kind of world to they actually obtain?

ii) Apropos (i), a presuppositionalist simultaneously argues *from* and *for* his Christian beliefs and criteria. These "common ground" assumptions implicate the Christian worldview. Naturalism lacks the metaphysical resources to underpin them. That's where transcendental arguments can come into play. Mind you, many presuppositionalists never get beyond question-begging slogans, but thinkers like Greg Welty and James Anderson have been making progress on that front, by formulated detailed arguments. Much work remains to be done.

iii) Another problem with common ground appeals is that unbelievers range along a spectrum. Some of them are intellectually evasive. Some of them are irrationally skeptical. It isn't always possible to have a constructive dialogue with an atheist. Take methodological atheism. The proper reaction is not to operate within that paradigm but to challenge that paradigm.

7. Apropos (6), a popular evidentialist slogan is to "follow the evidence wherever it leads". That's often a good rule of thumb, but it has limitations:

i) Everything can't be up for grabs. Our belief-system must have some stability and priorities.

ii) There's a dialectical relation between evidence and one's priority structure. On the one hand, one's plausibility structure ought to be informed by evidence. On the other hand, one's plausibility structure a ranking system that assigns degrees of plausibility to different kinds of claims.

There needs to be some give, some flexibility, in both directions.

For instance, how should I assess alien abduction stories? That involves conflicting lines of evidence. On the one hand there's testimonial evidence, which has some prima facie value. On the other hand, there's theoretical physics, which provides some prima facie evidence that aliens couldn't surmount the distance in light years. Not to mention other considerations.

iii) What if there's some prima facie evidence for physicalism, but physicalism entails eliminative materialism, which is arguably self-refuting? If following the evidence wherever it leads ends up leading you to a blind alley, then you need to back up. I refuse to follow the evidence over the cliff, which is what atheism amounts to. I have no epistemic duty to embrace nihilism. That's diabolically idiotic.

A response to Frame's presuppositionalism

A friend drew my attention to Andrew Loke's article, 'A response to John Frame's Presuppositional approach to faith and reason.'

https://www.academia.edu/38036165/Loke_Andrew._2018._A_response_to_John_Frame_s_Presuppositional_approach_to_faith_and_reason._Journal_of_Reformed_Theology_14_356-376._Brill._Pre-peer_review_version_

I don't wish to get mired in exegeting Frame's voluminous position. So I'll just focus on the ideas. What I say may well be consistent with Frame's position, but my response to Loke isn't meant to be a direct comparison.

> In contrast with the Evidential Approach, which uses experiences (including experiences of others e.g. their testimonies)…

But there are different kinds of experience. Headaches are experiences. Dreams are experiences. Moreover, there's a distinction between revelatory dreams and imaginary dreams. Private experiences are different from public experiences. So Loke needs to be more discriminating.

> …and reason as starting points,

But the status of human reason is worldview-dependent. If the backstory for human reason is naturalistic evolution or

deistic evolution, where reason is the byproduct of an aimless, stochastic process, then it's hard to see how reason can have any normative standing. If, by contrast, human reason is God-given, then it can be a criterion, although unaided human reason remains limited and fallible. In the sense of God-given reason, human reason can be one starting-point, even though that needs to be informed by other starting-points.

> Presuppositionalists assume the truth of the Christian Scripture as their starting point in their assessment of the truth-claims of Christianity.

I don't know what Loke means by "assuming" the truth of Christian Scripture. It's not just an arbitrary postulate.

> They acknowledge their use of circular argument; that is, a form of argument which presupposes the conclusion of what is to be proved.

i) Throughout his article, Loke frames the issue in terms of "circularity". But that has limited usefulness because circularity is a metaphor, and metaphors are secondary. They can useful illustrations, but in order to truly understand an idea, we need to be able to translate the metaphor into something more abstract.

ii) Loke fails to distinguish between *logical* circularity (in the sense of a syllogism) and *epistemic* circularity. Now, epistemic circularity is still philosophically controversial (like everything else in philosophy!), but it's a different kind of circularity. While epistemic circularity may or may not be satisfactory, it's not invalid or fallacious in the logical sense.

For instance, is there a noncircular argument for an external world? If idealism is empirically equivalent, can our belief in the external world avoid epistemic circularity?

> One of the main motivations of Presuppositionalists is to uphold the authority of Scripture. They are concerned that to assess the truth-claims of Christianity in a non-presuppositional way would be to judge Scripture by another, more ultimate standard.6 Frame thinks that God speaks with absolute authority throughout the Scripture, and his words cannot be subjected to proof and disproof.7 Frame thus concludes that 'in the final analysis we must believe Scripture on its own say-so.'8

But that doesn't rule out reasons for believing Scripture.

> The problem with Frame's argument is that it is self-defeating, for as Gary Habermas observes, the evidential method of judging claims of divine revelation is actually taught in Scripture itself. To cite a few examples, in the Old Testament, potential prophets are to be tested according to their own predictions (Deut. 18:21-22).

Which overlooks the parallel passage in Deut 13:1-5, where, even if the prediction comes true or he performs a miracle, he is still a false prophet in case he contradicts Mosaic revelation. So in that regard, Scripture is the ultimate criterion.

> Additionally, God is said to have challenged other gods to predict the future the way he could (Isa. 41:21-

> 29; 44:7, 24-28; 46:10; 48:5, 14). These passages portray a God who allows himself to be tested in such a way that his words could be disproved (i.e. if the prophesized message does not come true), and who passes the tests, such that Israel is called to be his witness of these mighty historical acts of confirmation (Isa. 44:6-8; 52:6).

No, not that *Yahweh's* words could be disproved, but that predictive failure exposes the fact that the words in question aren't from Yahweh but the imagination of a false prophet. Is Loke unable to draw that rudimentary distinction?

> Likewise, 1 Kings 18:20-45 portrays Elijah challenging the people to view an awesome miracle as God's vindication of his prophet and message. The New Testament portrays Jesus citing his miracles as evidences that he is the promised Messiah (Luke 7:18-23), and both Peter (Acts 2:22-24) and Paul (Acts 16:30-31) proclaim Jesus' resurrection as the validation of his teachings. These passages affirm that both believers and unbelievers are told to examine history using their reason and their senses in order to ascertain God's truth. But there is no hint in these passages that such evidential challenges displease God. On the contrary, God is said to have made the challenge himself.9

i) Loke fails to draw an elementary distinction between verification and falsification. God's claims are subject to evidential confirmation. It doesn't follow that God's claims are subject to evidential disconfirmation. If some claims are

demonstrably false, that means they weren't *God's* claims in the first place.

ii) They are not told to use their reason and senses even if their reason and senses are the byproduct of a blind natural process. From a biblical standpoint, their reason and senses are only (generally) reliable because God endowed them with reason and designed their senses. The same appeal doesn't work on naturalism.

iii) In addition, even that assumes the right use of reason. Scripture gives many examples of unbelievers whose reasoning is irrational.

> In his other writings, Frame acknowledges that the Scripture itself directs us to consider evidences outside itself, such as the 500 eyewitness in the case of Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor. 15:6), but he emphasizes that the witness' testimony is to be evaluated by way of a Biblical view of evidence—not by theories like those of Hume and Bultmann which reject all supernatural claims from the onset.12
>
> However, the problem with Frame's view is that his circular approach is nowhere endorsed in the Christian Scripture itself. Scriptural passages which advocate the testing of claims of divine revelation (e.g. Deut 18:21-22) and which issue the challenge to other gods (Isa 41:21-29 etc.) do not affirm that Scripture should determine what views of reasoning, evidences and epistemology are to be adopted in order to prove Scripture. On the contrary, these Scriptural passages presuppose that logical inferences from experiences

> are ways by which people can know whether prophecies have been fulfilled and whether miracles have occurred. These passages also presuppose that logical inferences from fulfilled prophecies, miracles, etc. are ways by which pagans can come to know who the true God is, without having to first presuppose that any Scripture should control the way in which a person chooses, evaluates, and formulates these evidences.

i) Is Scripture submitting to the judgement of folks who operate with the plausibility structures of Hume and Bultmann?

ii) Loke appeals to "evidence" as if that has an agreed upon meaning. But the concept of evidence didn't fall from the sky. Evidence is a philosophical concept, and there are competing concepts of evidence. At the bottom of my post I reproduce some different or divergent concepts of evidence.

iii) This is parallel to the distinction between moral epistemology and moral ontology. Unbelievers say you can be moral without God. But while it's sometimes possible to be moral without *believing* in God, that doesn't mean it's possible to be moral without God *existing*.

You can believe that milk comes from supermarkets rather than cows. Suppose you think cartons of milk are the natural state of milk. Normally that backstory won't impede your ability to function in the world. But the availability of milk requires a different backstory to be true.

> Paul did not argue for his view of evidence in a circular manner.

Not in 1 Cor 15:6. But consider statements like:

> **Let God be true, and every human being a liar (Rom 3:4)**
>
> **You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? (Rom 9:19-21).**

Isn't that "circular"?

> In another passage, Luke portrays Paul as questioning the reasonableness of the sceptics’ presupposition by asking ‘Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?’ (Acts 26:8, NIV). Following the Scriptural example of Paul (to which Frame would be committed) would imply that, when facing sceptics who reject all supernatural claims from the onset (such as Bultmann and Hume), the Christian should not argue for his/her view in a circular manner. Rather, he/she should show the unreasonableness of their rejection without circularity.

But Loke doesn't give us a noncircular argument to refute Hume and Bultmann.

> Other examples of non-circular arguments based on sensory experiences can be seen from the writings of Luke, who emphasizes that the resurrected Jesus was seen, heard, touch, and ate fish (e.g. Acts 1:3 cf. Luke 24:39-43). Similarly, the author of the Epistles of John emphasizes that the Incarnated Word was'what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us (1 John 1:1-2).

That's philosophically naive. It's a noncircular argument *given* sensory perception, but that only pushes the issue back a step. Does Loke have a noncircular argument for sensory perception? In a footnote, Loke quotes the following passage:

> Philosopher David Chalmers argues that 'even if I am in a matrix, my world is perfectly real' and that we could still know that we really have 'hands', only that our understanding of the underlying metaphysics need to be adjusted. For example, instead of understanding the hand as being fundamentally constituted by unobservable quantum entities, we understand the 'hand' as fundamentally constituted by computer inputs. See D. Chalmers, 'The Matrix as Metaphysics', in C. Grau (ed.), **Philosophers Explore the Matrix** (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005).

But Loke just leaves that hanging there. He doesn't seem to register how it complicates his straightforward appeal to "evidence" or "experience". Does he have a noncircular argument to debunk that skeptical thought-experiment? He can't debunk it by pointing to empirical evidence–since the point of Matrix-scenarios is that what we take to be empirical evidence might be delusive, and the illusion is indistinguishable from reality. What happens when you filter Lk 24:39-43, Jn 20-21, or 1 Jn 1:1-2 through a Matrix-scenario?

I'm not saying that's a reason to doubt the Resurrection. Rather, I'm saying that Loke unwittingly introduced an undercutter or defeater for his own position, given the way he chose to cast the issue.

> Frame thinks that the unbeliever, when most self-conscious, opposes the very rational principles to which Evidentialist apologists appeal, and he reasons in ways designed to exclude the theistic conclusion. However, they recognize that this does not imply that the human cognitive equipment has been affected to the extent that it is no longer able to arrive at some truth of God by non-circular reasoning. On the contrary, as Feinberg points out, this ability can be seen as a matter of God’s grace as well—his common grace.

That's not a counter to Frame's statement. Some unbelievers are more consistently naturalistic than others. Common ground isn't uniform.

> It hardly needs to be said that many Muslims also devoutly believe that their position is true, and they believe that it can be clearly recognized as such). But

> the Quran and the Bible cannot both be divinely inspired and inerrant because they contradict each other at various important points. This demonstrates that circular argumentation is fallacious.

The problem isn't simply that they contradict each other. These aren't symmetrical claimants. Muhammad himself, in his rise to power, appealed to the Bible, as he understood it, as precedent for his own message. He appealed to the witness of Christians and Jews. So the Koran requires biblical validation while the Bible doesn't require Koranic validation.

> Another problem with Frame's method is that one can come up with a coherent system of doctrine which is similar to that of Christianity and which can also give an equally compelling account of morality, rationality…

Is Loke appealing to merely hypothetical alternatives? If so, what about hypothetical non-Christian accounts of reason, evidence, and experience? If that's a problem for presuppositionalism, that's a problem for evidentialism, too.

> This is most evident in the case of the Law of Non-Contradiction: no one (whether Easterner or Westerner) can deny this Law without also affirming it. Indeed, a violation of the laws of logic would be non-existent.
>
> Philosopher Thomas Nagel observes that 'The appeal to reason is implicitly authorized by the challenge itself, so this is really a way of showing that the challenge is unintelligible. The charge of begging the question implies that there is an alternative—namely, to examine the reasons for and against the claim being

> challenged while suspending judgment about it. For the case of reasoning itself, however, no such alternative is available, since any considerations against the objective validity of a type of reasoning are inevitably attempts to offer reasons against it, and these must be rationally assessed. The use of reason in the response is not a gratuitous importation by the defender: it is demanded by the character of the objections offered by the challenger.'

i) But doesn't Frame say the same thing about the Christian worldview? Ultimately there's no alternative.

ii) Once again, the appeal to reason is worldview-dependent. The fact that reason is unavoidable doesn't mean it's reliable. Someone who's mentally ill still relies on his reasoning process, even though that's compromised. Someone who's color-blind relies on his defective vision, since that's the only vision he has. Someone who's high on acid relies on his perception of the world, even though he's hallucinating.

There's a difference between the use of reason and the normatively of reason. The normatively of reason requires a certain kind of backstory.

> Evidence, whatever else it is, is the kind of thing which can make a difference to what one is justified in believing or (what is often, but not always, taken to be the same thing) what it is reasonable for one to believe...Inasmuch as evidence is the sort of thing which confers justification, the concept of evidence is closely related to other fundamental normative concepts such as the concept of a reason...To the extent that what one is justified in believing depends

upon one's evidence, what is relevant is the bearing of one's total evidence.

Perhaps the root notion of evidence is that of something which serves as a reliable sign, symptom, or mark of that which it is evidence of. In Ian Hacking's phrase, this is ‘the evidence of one thing that points beyond itself’ (1975: 37). Thus, smoke is evidence of fire, Koplik spots evidence of measles...Of course, although the presence of Koplik spots is in fact a reliable guide to the presence of measles, one who is ignorant of this fact is not in a position to conclude that a given patient has measles, even if he or she is aware that the patient has Koplik spots. Someone who knows that Koplik spots are evidence of measles is in a position to diagnose patients in a way that someone who is ignorant of that fact is not. In general, the extent to which one is in a position to gain new information on the basis of particular pieces of evidence typically depends upon one's background knowledge.

This suggests that the notion of evidence in play in statements such as ‘evidence tends to justify belief’ and ‘rational thinkers respect their evidence’ cannot simply be identified with evidence in the sense of reliable indicator. Let's call evidence in the former sense normative evidence, and evidence in the latter sense indicator evidence...Reflection on the role that considerations of background theory play in determining how it is reasonable for one to respond to new information...

It is natural to suppose that the concept of evidence is intimately related to the cognitive desideratum of objectivity. According to this line of thought, individuals

and institutions are objective to the extent that they allow their views about what is the case or what ought to be done to be guided by the evidence, as opposed to (say) the typically distorting influences of ideological dogma, prejudice in favor of one's kin, or texts whose claim to authority is exhausted by their being venerated by tradition...According to this picture, a central function of evidence is to serve as a neutral arbiter among rival theories and their adherents...The slogan 'the priority of evidence to theory' has sometimes been employed in an attempt to capture this general theme. However, this slogan has itself been used in a number of importantly different ways that it is worth pausing to distinguish.

The idea of evidence as a kind of ultimate court of appeal, uniquely qualified to generate agreement among those who hold rival theories, is a highly plausible one. Nevertheless, complications with this simple picture—some more serious than others—abound. Above, we took note of the widely-held view according to which the bearing of a given piece of evidence on a given hypothesis depends on considerations of background theory. Thus, two individuals who hold different background theories might disagree about how strongly a particular piece of evidence confirms a given theory, or indeed, about whether the evidence confirms the theory at all. Of course, if the question of who has the superior background theory is itself susceptible to rational adjudication, then this possibility need pose no deep threat to objectivity.

However, a recurrent motif in twentieth century philosophy of science is that the bearing of evidence on theory is mediated by factors that might vary between

individuals in ways that do not admit of such rational adjudication. Imagine two eminent scientists, both of whom are thoroughly acquainted with all of the available evidence which bears on some theory. One believes the theory, the other believes some different, incompatible theory instead.

Let's assume then that evidence sometimes does successfully discharge the function of neutral arbiter among theories and is that which secures intersubjective agreement among inquirers. What must evidence be like, in order for it to play this role? That is, given that evidence sometimes underwrites intersubjective agreement, what constraints does this place on answers to the question: what sorts of things are eligible to count as evidence?

Above, we noted that the traditional epistemological demand that one's evidence consist of that to which one has immediate and unproblematic access...For it is natural to think that the ability of evidence to play this latter role depends crucially on its having an essentially public character, i.e., that it is the sort of thing which can be grasped and appreciated by multiple individuals.

Reflection on examples drawn from more homely contexts also casts doubt on the idea that all genuine evidence is in principle accessible to multiple individuals. When one has a headache, one is typically justified in believing that one has a headache. While others might have evidence that one has a headache—evidence afforded, perhaps, by one's testimony, or by one's non-linguistic behavior—it is implausible that whatever evidence others possess is identical with that which justifies one's own belief that one has a headache. Indeed, it seems dubious that others could

have one's evidence, given that others cannot literally share one's headache.

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evidence/

Update: "Begging the question".

Begging the question

Andrew Loke replied to my post:

https://www.academia.edu/38063165/Reply_to_respondents_to_my_reply_to_Frame

In his rejoinder, Loke repeats the allegation that presuppositionalists, or Frame in particular, are guilty of "circularity". I'll have more to say about that later on, but for the moment I'd like to focus on Loke's usage. What does he mean by circular argumentation? Here's one explanation:

> In reply, while some authors may think that circularity is necessary, this does not imply that circular arguments of the sort which Presuppositionalists use — the sort which presuppose the conclusion as the premise (e.g. 'God exists [presupposition], therefore God exists [conclusion]'49) — are therefore valid.

Here Loke seems to be defining circularity in logical terms: a premise/conclusion relation. But one problem with Locke's explanation is failure to distinguish between a premise and a presupposition. A premise is an element in a logical syllogism. For instance, many philosophical, historical, and scientific arguments take for granted the existence of other minds, the external world, sense knowledge, &c. Those are presuppositions rather than syllogistic premises. They don't figure in the actual argument. Rather, they function as necessary background conditions or background assumptions.

Here's another explanation:

> to show by non-circular argument (i.e. without begging the question)
>
> In my article, I explain why his circularity implies begging-the-question, and why his claim ought to be rejected.

i) Here Loke seems to define circularity in terms of begging the question. If so, that's a different definition than a premise/conclusion relation. So he appears to oscillate between two different explanations. How do these relate to each other?

ii) Is his claim that circular reasoning is the same thing as begging the question, or is circular reasoning a general fallacy while begging the question is a specific kind of circular reasoning? How do these relate to each other?

iii) To say circular reasoning begs the question only pushes the issue back a step, because that raises the question: what does he mean by begging the question? Here's how he seems to answer that question:

> My use of hypothetical alternatives is to demonstrate the fallacy of the question-begging type of argument used by Frame. An evidentialist argument for Christianity does not beg the question against non-Christian accounts of reason, evidence, and experience, and thus is not beset by the problem.
>
> Which even sceptics of the Bible would need to rely on, thus it is non-circular in the sense that it doesn’t beg the question against the epistemology of the sceptics of the Bible...

i) So he appears to define begging the question by making the epistemology of non-Christians the standard of comparison. A presuppostionalist begs the question by failing to meet the non-Christian on his own grounds. Their accounts of reason, evidence, and experience is the yardstick. Presuppositionalism is fallacious because it doesn't measure up to that benchmark.

ii) So the relation seems to be: circularity>begging the question>coming up short according to non-Christian epistemology.

iii) If that's what he means, then he thinks the Christian apologist unilaterally shoulders the burden of proof. The onus is not on the non-Christian since non-Christian epistemology is the criterion. The way to avoid begging the question is for the Christian apologist to operate according to non-Christian accounts of reason, evidence, and experience. If that's what Loke means, then the non-Christian controls the terms of the debate. The game is played on his turf by his rules. You can only win if you beat him by his own rules.

iv) If, however, that's what Loke means, it's unclear how that constitutes a fallacy. While it may well be unconvincing to a non-Christian for a Christian apologist to operate with a Christian epistemology, persuasiveness is a psychological rather than logical condition. A sound or valid argument can be unconvincing.

v) And even assuming that's a fallacy, why wouldn't that be a two-sided fallacy? If it's fallacious for a Christian to operate with a Christian epistemology when debating a non-Christian, is it not equally fallacious for a non-Christian to operate with a non-Christian epistemology when debating a Christian? Why does Loke seem to insist on a double

standard–where there's a higher standard for Christian than non-Christian?

Indeed, Loke goes on to say:

> I wrote on p.7: 'Luke portrays Paul as questioning the reasonableness of the sceptics' presupposition by asking 'Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?' (Acts 26:8, NIV). Following the Scriptural example of Paul (to which Frame would be committed) would imply that, when facing sceptics who reject all supernatural claims from the onset (such as Bultmann and Hume), the Christian should not argue for his/her view in a circular manner. Rather, he/she should show the unreasonableness of their rejection without circularity.'

i) So here he concedes that a non-Christian epistemology is not automatically the standard of comparison. But if a non-Christian epistemology is not necessarily the default criterion, then what does it mean for Loke to say the presuppositionalist begs the question against non-Christian accounts of reason, evidence, and experience? If that's not the benchmark, how do you beg the question against it?

ii) Maybe his point is not that non-Christian epistemologies set the ground rules, but that presuppositionalists fail to even engage the other side. He concedes that it's sometimes necessary to challenge non-Christian accounts of reason, evidence, and experience. So perhaps he believes there's epistemological common ground that isn't distinctively Christian or distinctively non-Christian. A generic epistemology independent of any particular worldview.

If so, doesn't that entail an artificially compartmentalized view of reality? If Christianity is true, then ultimately a true theory of knowledge must be grounded in Christian reality. Suppose a non-Christian epistemology is partially true. But to be consistently true, it must be developed in a Christian direction. The task of a presuppositionalist is to trace out the interconnectedness of that Christian reality. Reality as a tapestry of interwoven threads.

I'll have more to say about this further down. I'm just attempting to clarify Loke's categories.

> I illustrated the kinds of experiences I have in mind using examples of the a posteriori Cosmological Argument, the resurrection of Jesus, etc.

Of course, most humans haven't experienced the Resurrection. Most Christians haven't experienced the Resurrection.

> Steve missed the point I mention on p.23 of my paper: to argue that our rationality requires God as a cause is different from arguing that our rationality depends on presupposing God for the justification of our beliefs.

To begin with, his web document lacks pagination. But this is apparently what he's alluding to:

> Additionally, to argue that our rationality requires God as a cause is different from arguing that our rationality depends on presupposing God for the justification of our beliefs. While one might argue that one’s ability to know the reality that one is in pain (for example) is dependent on God (in the sense that the ultimate origination of the human conscious mind depends on a

> Personal Creator 64), one does not need to depend on God in order to justify the belief that one is in pain (one’s direct experience is enough to justify it)! Since presupposing God is not necessarily nor undeniable for the justification of our beliefs in the same way that presupposing reason is necessary and undeniable, the assumption of God in response to atheists is a gratuitous importation but the assumption of reason is not.

It's unclear what Loke thinks is mean by presupposing God for the justification of our beliefs. Consider two different senses of justified belief:

i) To be in a state of justified belief

ii) To provide a philosophical justification for your belief

An unbeliever can have many natural beliefs that are justified because his beliefs were formed by a reliable process that God designed. That's different from saying he can justify his beliefs without recourse to God.

> I use ’assume’ in the sense intended by Frame (see below)

i) It's unclear what Loke thinks presuppositionalists mean by that. To take a comparison, when Aquinas wrote the **Summa Contra Gentiles**, he had the conclusion in mind before he began. He didn't go into it wondering if God exists. He wasn't in suspense, waiting to resolve the question until he worked through all the arguments. Rather, the arguments were formulated to support a foreordained goal. When William Lane Craig debates atheists, he doesn't go into the encounter undecided.

ii) One technique in presuppositionalism is to ask the atheist to assume the Christian viewpoint for the sake of argument, then study the explanatory power of Christian theism from the inside out. Comparing and contorting the explanatory power of Christian theism to non-Christian alternatives. But to adopt the opposing viewpoint for the sake of argument is not a fallacy. Rather, that's a standard tactic in philosophical argument.

> If Steve affirms reasons as the basis for believing Scripture, then how is his approach different from that of Classical/Evidential Apologist?

Reason and evidence are value-laden concepts. They don't exist in a vacuum.

> That is because there were already evidences to regard the Mosaic revelation to be from God in the first place, see e.g. the contest of miracles between Moses and the magicians of Pharaoh in Exodus 7, which took place before Deut 13 was written.

Which takes for granted the historicity of Exodus. It's not as if Loke has direct access to the reported miracles in Exodus. So he's depending on a literary record. But why doesn't that beg the question against non-Christian accounts of reason, evidence, and experience? Most non-Christians don't concede the historical accuracy of that narrative.

> ‘Could’ as understood from the perspective of people in the Isaiah passages who doubt whether YHWH is the true God; they are challenged to check out whether YHWH says X will happen but not-X happen instead.

> Here I am using the word God to refer to ‘God of the Bible’. The issue is epistemological: how do we know that ‘God of the Bible’ is indeed the perfect and true God who never errs? The Scriptural passages I cited above indicate that one can use verification and falsification to answer this question.

But that's confused. It fails to enter into the viewpoint of the text. If the speaker is actually Yahweh, then his predictions cannot prove false. And Isaiah has no doubt that Yahweh speaks to and through him. From the standpoint of the text, this is not a hypothesis. That Yahweh might be wrong is not a realistic scenario. Rather, it's an argument ad impossibile. Per impossibile counterfactuals.

Now, Loke might say the very question at issue is whether Yahweh exists. Is Yahweh in fact the speaker? How do we distinguish true from false religious claimants? But while that's a legitimate question, the Isaian passages aren't inviting people to test Yahweh's claim on the open-ended assumption that Yahweh might be a nonentity and Isaiah a charlatan. Loke is appealing to the text in a way that cuts against the grain of the text. Whether the viewpoint of the text is correct is something to consider, but the text itself is hardly undecided on the question. Loke is blurring an outsider perspective with the insider perspective of the text.

And this repeats his failure to distinguish between verification and falsification. At best, the claims are only hypothetically falsifiable. If (per impossibile) Yahweh made a false prediction, then Yahweh would be a false god.

> The Biblical authors only challenged them to use their reason and senses simpliciter without mentioning that they have to presuppose the Biblical God.

That's so silly. Willfully shortsighted. The God who issues the challenge is the biblical Creator who made their mind and senses. That's the context. The challenge is coming from the Biblical God. It's not coming from Zeus or naturalistic evolution or deistic evolution.

> The fact that their reasoning is often irrational does not imply that human cognitive equipment has been affected to the extent that it is no longer able to arrive at some truth of God by reasoning.

The noetic effects of sin primarily impact the will rather than the intellect. Although the unregenerate can understand the Bible, they hate it or find it incredible.

> No, because Paul already had reasons to believe that the God of Jesus is the true God before writing Romans. Paul was converted because he saw the resurrected Jesus, and he wrote 1 Corinthians 15 prior to writing Romans. As I explain on p.12: 'The reasoning of Paul, Luke, John etc. seems to be as follows: to show by non-circular argument (i.e. without begging the question) that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed sent from God based on logical inferences from evidences (i.e. miracles, including his resurrection), and then to regard Jesus' words and wisdom as the highest standard.'

i) Paul's belief in Yahweh and OT Scripture antedates his Christian conversion. And so far as we know, he witnessed no miracles to validate his belief in Yahweh or the OT prior to his conversion.

ii) Notice that Loke is appealing to Paul's Damascus road experience. But that's an appeal to Scripture!

> Concerning the Romans 9 passage, see my article 'Is the Saving Grace of God resistible?'

That's irrelevant to how the passages function in my initial response to Loke. Moreover, his article recycles cliche arguments and objections that I've addressed on multiple occasions.

> Steve missed Chalmer's point, which is we do not need to debunk that skeptical thought- experiment in order to know that we have hands.

No, I didn't miss Chalmer's point; rather, I disagree with his point. He said:

> Even if I am in a matrix, my world is perfectly real' and that we could still know that we really have 'hands', only that our understanding of the underlying metaphysics need to be adjusted. For example, instead of understanding the hand as being fundamentally constituted by unobservable quantum entities, we understand the 'hand' as fundamentally constituted by computer inputs.

i) That's equivocal since simulated hands are hardly equivalent to physical hands.

ii) Moreover, that distinction relies on knowing the difference between the illusion generated by the program and the real world outside the program. But the very question at issue is whether someone in the Matrix can discover that difference.

> Very briefly, I explained on p.188 of my book **God and Ultimate Origins** (Springer Nature 2017) that even the

> radical sceptic who doubts the existence of the world external to his/her mind cannot avoid the conclusion that this Personal First Cause exists. The reason is because such a sceptic must still grant the existence of changes and causes, e.g. in his or her own subjective mental states, and/or in the computer inputs of the Matrix causing our sensations. Given the impossibility of an actual infinite regress of changes and causes (see Chapters 2 and 3 of that book), as well as the truth of the Causal Principle that everything that begins to exist has a cause (the violation of which would entail that his/her subjective experiences would be very different from what they are; see Chapter 5), the conclusion that an initially changeless and Personal First Cause (=Creator) exists would still follow (see Chapter 6). In which case the 'experiences of resurrected Jesus' noted in Lk 24:39-43, Jn 20-21, or 1 Jn 1:1- 2 should still be regarded as ultimately caused by the First Cause Creator. Even though, as in the hand example, our understanding of the underlying metaphysics of Jesus' resurrection would need to be adjusted if it turns out that we are in a Matrix, we can still affirm Jesus' resurrection just as we can still affirm we have hands as Chalmers explained. In any case, given that there is no good reason that we are living in a Matrix and that there must be a Creator regardless of whether we are in a Matrix, following Occam's razor one should affirm that God (the Creator) raised Jesus from the dead.

That's very slippery:

i) Yes, some theistic proofs could be retooled to apply in a Matrix scenario. However, someone in the Matrix has no basis of comparison. He's in no position to compare the

ubiquitous illusion with objective reality. Even if he suspected that something undetectable is causing his perceptions, he can't discover what that is.

ii) A Biblical narrative that only happens in the Matrix is imaginary.

iii) I agree that there's no good reason to believe we're in the Matrix. But I wasn't the one who brought that up.

> I grant Frame's statement and Steve's, my 'counter' is merely to point out that Frame's statement does not prove his case against the Evidentialist Apologist, i.e. Frame's statement does not imply that human cognitive equipment has been affected to the extent that it is no longer able to arrive at some truth of God by non-circular reasoning.
>
> They aren't perfectly symmetrical, but the point remains that the question-begging type of argument used by Frame is fallacious. In order to answer the question 'How do we know that the Christian Bible hasn't been distorted as the Muslim claimed?', we need extrabiblical historical evidence.

Presuppositionalism doesn't reject extrabiblical evidence.

> The fact that reason is unavoidable shows that one is not begging the question by using reason to argue for reason, while the reliability of reason in many (not all; e.g. not mentally ill) cases of reasoning is demonstrated by its ability to arrive at true conclusions (e.g. there cannot be shapeless cubes)

It begs the question if naturalistic evolution supplies the backstory for human reason. For even if human reason is

unavoidable under that scenario, it doesn't follow that human reason is reliable.

> Steve goes on to discuss some complications concerning evidence. I agree that there are complications involved, but we need to focus on the specific cases relevant to Christian apologetics which is what Frame and I are discussing. Various philosophers have explained the evidences used by the Cosmological argument, the Teleological Argument, the historical argument for Jesus' resurrection etc. and formulated these arguments in a way which indicate that these arguments do not need to presuppose the existence of a Christian God (see e.g. **Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology**, my book **God and Ultimate Origins**, etc).

Ironically, a number of theistic proofs are transcendental arguments. The moral argument, the argument from reason, the argument from abstract objects, the argument from counterfactuals, &c., are transcendental.

Sometimes that requires multiple steps. It may first be necessary to argue for the thing in question before considering the necessary background conditions. Or one might argue that if X is the case, then that commits us to Y. Yet transcendental arguments are the stock-in-trade of presuppositionalism.

> Frame himself uses the term 'circular'...

There's a formulaic quality to Loke's objection because he constantly repeats the charge of "circularity". But as I pointed out in my initial response, that's a metaphor.

Argumentation or reasoning isn't literally circular or noncircular. So belaboring a metaphor, and constantly using a metaphor as the frame of reference, inhibits rational analysis. That does nothing to advance understanding. As Peter van Inwagen explains in another context:

> These philosophers have fallen prey to what I may call verbal essentialism. That is to say, it is essential to their discussions that they involve certain words … It would be impossible to translate their discussions into language that did not involve those words. "Some Thoughts on An Essay on Free Will", **The Harvard Review of Philosophy** 22 (2015), 17.

Now let's revisit the question of whether "circular reasoning" and "begging the question" are necessarily fallacious. As one source explains:

> However, if the circle is very much larger, including a wide variety of claims and a large set of related concepts, then the circular reasoning can be informative and so is not considered to be fallacious.
>
> https://www.iep.utm.edu/fallacy/#CircularReasoning
>
> Begging the Question
>
> A form of circular reasoning in which a conclusion is derived from premises that presuppose the conclusion. Normally, the point of good reasoning is to start out at one place and end up somewhere new, namely having reached the goal of increasing the degree of reasonable belief in the conclusion. The point is to make progress, but in cases of begging the question there is no progress.

> Insofar as the conclusion of a deductively valid argument is "contained" in the premises from which it is deduced, this containing might seem to be a case of presupposing, and thus any deductively valid argument might seem to be begging the question. It is still an open question among logicians as to why some deductively valid arguments are considered to be begging the question and others are not. Some logicians suggest that, in informal reasoning with a deductively valid argument, if the conclusion is psychologically new insofar as the premises are concerned, then the argument isn't an example of the fallacy. Other logicians suggest that we need to look instead to surrounding circumstances, not to the psychology of the reasoner, in order to assess the quality of the argument. For example, we need to look to the reasons that the reasoner used to accept the premises. Was the premise justified on the basis of accepting the conclusion? A third group of logicians say that, in deciding whether the fallacy is present, more evidence is needed. We must determine whether any premise that is key to deducing the conclusion is adopted rather blindly or instead is a reasonable assumption made by someone accepting their burden of proof. The premise would here be termed reasonable if the arguer could defend it independently of accepting the conclusion that is at issue.
>
> https://www.iep.utm.edu/fallacy/#BeggingtheQuestion

So it's not a given that circular reasoning or begging the question is a fallacy in principle. That depends on other considerations.

Here's what a specialist on logical fallacies has to say:

> Circular reasoning is very important and characteristic of all kinds of everyday argumentation where feedback is used. So it is often quite correct and useful — not fallacious, as traditionally portrayed in the logic textbooks. Studying circular reasoning, for example, is very important for artificial intelligence, e.g. in expert systems. Circular reasoning can be used fallaciously, however, in arguments which require the use of premises that can be shown to be better established than the conclusion to be proved. The requirement here is one of evidential priority (see INFORMAL FALLACIES: Arguing in a Circle). Arguing in a circle becomes a fallacy of petitio principii or begging the question where an attempt is made to evade the burden of proving one of the premises of an argument by basing it on the prior acceptance of the conclusion to be proved (See Walton, 1991). So the fallacy of begging the question is a systematic tactic to evade fulfillment of a legitimate BURDEN OF PROOF by the proponent of an argument in dialogue by using a circular structure of argument to block the further progress of dialogue and, in particular, to undermine the capability of the respondent, to whom the argument was directed, to ask legitimate critical questions in reply. Douglas Walton, "Circular Reasoning," **A Companion to Epistemology**, ed. Jonathan Dancy & Ernest Sosa (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992), 66.

So it's necessary to distinguish between vicious and virtuous circular reasoning. Therefore, it's incumbent on critics of presuppositionalism to demonstrate that insofar as presuppositionalism engages in circular reasoning, the kind

of circular reasoning falls into the vicious rather than virtuous category.

And here's an example he gives of valid circular reasoning:

> In mathematics, it is common practice to start at proposition A and then prove B, then start again at B and prove that A follows. An equivalence proof in mathematics, of the if and only if type, often takes this form. Although the form of proof is circular, in many instances such a proof is rightly thought non-fallacious. D. Walton, Are Circular Arguments Necessarily Vicious? **American Philosophical Quarterly** 22 (1985), 263.

And here he unpacked the distinction:

> The conclusion to be drawn is that begging the question is a fallacy where `fallacy' means an argument that fails to perform a useful function in contributing to a goal of dialogue. So conceived, begging the question a pragmatic fallacy, a failure that needs to be evaluated in relation to how an argument has been used in a context of dialogue. In particular, one function of argument is the probative or doubt-removing (or doubt-reducing) function which presupposes the following framework of dialogue. One participant, the questioner, has doubts or questions concerning a particular conclusion. The other participant, the arguer or proponent, has the job or role in the dialogue of proving this conclusion to the satisfaction of the questioner, according to the requirements of burden of proof appropriate for the type of dialogue and the particular case. Now if the proponent puts forward a circular argument, of such a

> type that the only way the questioner could possibly resolve his doubts, or back up one of the premises by some line of proving or supporting it, would be to prove it from the conclusion, then the argument begs the question. The determination of petitio in a given case, according to this analysis, is a matter of the lines of argumentation leading into the proponent's conclusion available to the questioner. If no lines into a premise are open that do not already presume the truth of the conclusion, then the argument cannot fulfill its proper probative function in the dialogue. For this reason, an argument that begs the question can be properly evaluated as fallacious in a given case. D. Walton, "Begging the Question as a Pragmatic Fallacy", **Synthese** 100 (1994), 127-8.

So, in order for begging the question to be fallacious, certain conditions must be met over and above "circularity".

i) Assigning the burden of proof. Does only one or each side have a burden of proof? If, in a debate, Christian and atheist share a common burden of proof, then the atheist can't dictate the criteria. He can't legitimately impose on the Christian the terms of a successful argument. He is not the referee. Naturalism is not the presumptive position which a Christian must overcome.

ii) In addition, there's a distinction between defensive and offensive apologetics. What if the aim of the Christian is not to satisfy the atheist, but to explain and defend the Christian rationale, in response to outsider objections? He'd like to be able to convince the atheist to see it his way, but that's not a condition for a successful defense. The atheist may have arbitrary standards. Persuasion requires sufficient

common ground, which varies from one disputant to another.

iii) Furthermore, persuasion is psychological. A Christian apologist has no control over the mindset of an atheist. He can't make him believe. What if the atheist is unreasonable? What if the atheist is willfully intransigent? It's not the responsibility of the Christian apologist to be convincing, but to present good arguments. It's the duty of the atheist to be amendable to good arguments for the opposing position. You can't reason with someone who's unreasonable. Their mindset is not the standard of comparison. While persuasion is an ideal goal, it's not how to judge the quality of evidence.

What would you become if...

i) This is Rauser's M.O. Constantly posing skeptical hypotheticals. While there's some value in that exercise, it's nihilistic to make that your stock-in-trade.

And it gets to be silly, since you can pose skeptical hypotheticals about anything. "Suppose you came to believe that your wife was actually an extraterrestrial clone of your wife? What would you do then?" What's the point?

ii) In addition, the question is ambiguous. As stated, it's a psychological question rather than a factual question. It's not "what would you become if Christian was false (or

demonstrably false)", but "if you came to *believe* that Christianity is false…"

iii) Suppose I play along with the question for argument's sake. In that event, I wouldn't become anything. I'd have nowhere else to go. I wouldn't know what to believe. There's nothing else for me to turn to. Nothing else to believe in.

iv) But here's another response: "What's more likely–that Christianity is wrong or that I'm wrong about Christianity?"

Faith without a floor

1. I typically avoid debating apologetic method, not because I think it's unimportant, but in part because it's usually an onramp without an offramp. Both sides just keep going in circles. Likewise, having worked out my own methodology years ago, I prefer to act on that rather than talk about it. However, I make the occasional exception.

Evidentialist apologists have made, and continue to make, tremendous contributions to Christian apologetics. Contributions which can be shamelessly appropriated by presuppositional apologetics!

That said, a fundamental objection I have to evidentialism is that it has no theological floor. Because everything is based on prima facie evidence, everything is up for grabs. And that's not just hypothetical.

• If Gen 1 appears to be unscientific, then the evidentialist reinterprets it as fiction or legend.

• If the ages of the antediluvians appear to be naturally unrealistic, the evidentialist reinterprets them as symbolic or legendary.

• If Noah's flood appears to be unscientific, the evidentialist reinterprets that as fiction or legend.

• If the Exodus lacks independent corroboration, the evidentialist reinterprets that as fiction or legend.

• If the new temple in Ezekiel appears to be a disappointed expectation, the evidentialist interprets that as prophetic failure.

• If the Book of Daniel appears to be unhistorical, the evidentialist reinterprets that as fiction or prophecy after the fact.

• If some end-of-the-world prophecies in the Gospels appear to be wrong, the evidentialist lowers his Christology.

These are just samples. The list could be multiplied.

2. Now in fairness, reexamining traditional interpretations is not unique to evidentialists. Christians in general feel some pressure for our understanding of Scripture and our understanding of the world to match.

But in the case of evidentialism, there's a pattern–indeed a policy–of abandoning one outpost after another. Nothing is nonnegotiable. The border keeps contracting. Christian theology fades away, piece-by-piece.

3. An evidentialist might counter, so is your position that we should continue believing despite the evidence? We should simply ignore the evidence?

Well, I don't think Christianity suffers from a lack of evidence. Quite the contrary.

But the problem with the evidentialist is their failure to appreciate that the Christian faith is a unit. You can't keep moving the landmarks. What you believe isn't Christianity. A Christian faith without a floor isn't a Christian alternative.

Christian faith requires a baseline commitment. It demands personal tenacity. It's what you're supposed to live by, die by, or die for.

Of course, evidentialists range along a continuum. But it's like the moving walkway at airports. You may get off before you reach the end, but stepping on the autowalk signifies consent to go the whole way.

Or, to vary the metaphor, it's like getting married, where bride and groom both make allowance for an open marriage. They may not actually have extramarital affairs, but they're prepared to. They've given themselves permission. That's understood by both of them going into the wedding ceremony.

Color-coded Bible

My post

https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2019/11/faith-without-floor.html

provoked a conversation in the combox which I'm posting separately because it offers a high-level comparison and contrast between the respective positions:

Lydia McGrew
I would say that evidentialism per se doesn't tell us anything about any of those *specific* things. If we imagine an evidentialist who is convinced of the most conservative position on all of those specific things, and thinks he has extremely strong evidence for them, then there is no reason to talk about a "floor" at all anymore, unless we assume that he's just missing some significant piece of evidence right now.

I would put the marriage analogy a little differently: Suppose that I say that I believe that my husband exists based upon evidence, not as a presupposition.

And suppose someone says, "Well, then, you could in theory become convinced that your husband doesn't exist? So it could go that low, there's no floor?"

How would one answer this? Presumably one would say, "Well, that's a crazy scenario. Are we imagining that I get some almost unimaginably bizarre influx of new evidence in which I become rationally convinced that my husband is really a robot inserted into our country by space aliens, or what?"

In other words, there are tons of things that we are so over-justified in believing *by evidence* that we can only envisage becoming convinced that they are false if we make up the wildest of future evidential scenarios, which we'd have to be crazy to lose sleep over.

Does that mean that we are "presuppositionalists" about those things? No, of course not. It means that our evidence is so mountainous and overwhelming that we have, by *evidential* means, a kind of "practical certainty" about them so that we would have to rip up huge amounts of our other justified beliefs (in this case, our justified confidence that space alien robots are not successfully impersonating humans over many decades, etc.) in order to change our minds about them.

In that trivial sense one can say that there is "no floor" on whether, in principle, one could abandon such a belief, as long as it isn't something known a priori. 1 + 1 = 2 is more justified than "I have a hand" or "My husband is not a robot." But that's not an argument against being an evidentialist about such propositions.

steve
A problem I have with that response is that while I used some picturesque metaphors to illustrate the principle, my primary examples aren't hypothetical, much less farfetched hypotheticals, but real-life examples, and not exceptional but commonplace. Lots of folks who used to be conservative Christians but over time the content of their faith atrophies along the pattern I describe. It's not so much that the bottom fell out of their faith, but that their faith had no bottom to begin with.

Lydia McGrew

Sure, but presumably presupps don't have *particular* positions on all of those things as part of their "floor." At least I wouldn't imagine that they do. There's nothing about being a presupp per se that means you have to have one particular position on the ages of the patriarchs or Noah's flood. I can easily imagine presupps disagreeing among themselves about those issues.

Nor is there anything especially friendly to "myth or legend" in the evidentialist position.

I can easily imagine a presupp who takes a more "liberal" position on those particular issues than an evidentialist. Or I can imagine a presupp. and an evidentialist having exactly the same set of things where they draw a line and say, "No, I'm not going to change my mind on that."

The meta-level positions don't really tell us where someone's "floor" is going to fall. I have a really strong position on the historical Adam. I can easily imagine a presupp. who would be more friendly than I am to theistic evolution for the body of man.

In practice, I suspect that both presupps and evidentialists have as their practical "floor" those things that they tacitly or explicitly believe are extremely strongly justified by the data, including the data of Scripture. The reason that a particular position on the deity of Christ is a non-negotiable is (in no small measure) because we all recognize that it is over-justified by the Scriptural data as a tenet of Christianity. But that's not the case on, e.g., a local vs. a universal flood.

I would instance here Paul Moser as a guy who is a sort of rabid neo-Barthian and hates evidentialism with the passion of a thousand burning suns. I'd be willing to bet a sum of

money that his positions are *far* more liberal on all of those issues than mine and that he has a lower "floor" than mine on other issues as well.

steve
To generalize, presuppers have a more theological orientation whereas evidentialists have a more historical orientation. By that I mean, evidentialists approach the Bible as historians–in contrast to presuppers who approach the Bible as a religious document (as well as a historical document), so that, as a matter of principle, presuppers treat Christian theology and Bible narratives as a unit–rather than an assemblage of separable parts, to be individually reaffirmed or discarded. (Which doesn't mean presuppers, or at least the most intelligent representatives, are unconcerned with the value of corroborative evidence, where available.)

As long as we're toying with hypotheticals, here's another hypothetical way to frame the difference between presuppers and evidentialists:

i) Suppose the Book of Esther made demonstrably false historical claims. An evidentialist might say that just means we should dispense with inerrancy. The Book of Esther might still be a historically useful witness to an especially trying time in Jewish history, but it's not infallible. It's comparable to 1 Maccabees.

By contrast, a presupper might say in that case it's not that Scripture is fallible, but that Esther isn't Scripture. Scripture wasn't mistaken; rather, the canonization of Esther was mistaken. We don't dispense with inerrancy but with errant books.

ii) Put another way, presuppers accept or reject books as a unit rather than accepting or rejecting parts of (the same) books.

iii) That's because presuppers regard Scripture as a religious document (as well as a historical document). A supernatural rather than naturalistic product.

iv) BTW, this isn't a uniquely presuppositional approach to the Bible. I also approach the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and the ARCANA CŒLESTIA (to cite three representatives examples) as religious documents. They purportedly originate in supernatural encounters, and that's how I evaluate them (although historical analysis is certainly pertinent, where possible). As such, I accept or reject them as a unit. I don't affirm parts of them while discarding other parts. Rather, I accept or reject them in toto.

Of course, the Koran does have some incidental historical and autobiographical value regarding the life and times of Muhammad. It's worthless on Bible history, but does shed light on a particular period in Middle Eastern history.

To illustrate the contrast from different, but related examples, here are some more comparisons:

i) As I presupper, I don't approach the Koran the same way I approach the Jewish Wars by Josephus. Josephus wrote a historical account, not a religious document. It doesn't claim to be Scripture or divine revelation.

I can accept or reject parts of the Jewish Wars, if some parts are of dubious historicity.

By contrast, the Koran is first and foremost a revelatory claimant. Considered on those terms, it reject it in toto.

ii) Considered as a canonical candidate, I reject 1 Maccabees in toto. That's if I judge it on Catholic grounds.

iii) However, 1 Maccabees isn't a Catholic document. It was appropriated by the Catholic church, but it didn't originate in Catholicism. It's a pre-Catholic, pre-Christian document. A historical document about the Maccabean revolt. It doesn't claim to be Scripture. So at that level, I can accept parts of it and reject parts of it, if some parts are of dubious historicity.

iv) Consider the scribal/apocryphal additions to Daniel, Mark, and John. I don't accept some parts of Daniel, Mark, and John while rejecting other parts. Rather, I don't regard the apocryphal additions to Daniel, or the scribal interpolations to Mark and John (the Long Ending of Mark, the Pericope Adulterae) to be parts of those books in the first place. They're not original to Daniel, Mark, and John.

v) This is not to deny that the same document can be both historical and religious. But if a document puts itself forward as a candidate for Scripture, then I'll assess the status of the document on religious terms rather than historical terms. Of course, if the revelatory claimant makes blatantly false historical claims, that doesn't help its case!

Lydia McGrew
What I'm pushing back against here is the to my mind mistaken view that evidentialism says, "Never come to a strong conclusion about anything" or "always hold a lower-than-really-high probability for all religious propositions." There is nothing about evidentialism that says that. That's maybe a caricature that arises understandably from

statements like, "Always follow the evidence," but my point is that you can follow the evidence and thereby come to an extremely high confidence in a proposition such that you don't envisage changing your mind on it ever. It's not like evidentialism puts some kind of artificial "ceiling" on the degree of confidence you can have in any religious proposition, like you have to hang around in a state of semi-uncertainty about the deity of Christ (or whatever) all your life so that you can prove to yourself that you're open-minded and ready to follow the evidence. I forget if it's GK Chesterton who has that famous quotation about how open-mindedness is fine so long as it doesn't prevent us from closing our minds upon the truth when we find it. An evidentialist can say "amen" to that at least as loudly as a presuppositionalist.

steve
There's the question of what motivates a reinterpretation. For instance, the reason people question or outright deny the longevity of the antediluvians is because they think that's unrealistic. Whereas a presupper would say it's realistic because that's attested in Scripture.

Now, I agree with you that one can postulate hypothetical scenarios which create untenable dilemmas for presuppers. But like hypothetical moral dilemmas, that ultimately becomes a question of divine providence in real life. Will God allow believers to be confronted with untenable intellectual dilemmas? That also depends on how much control we think God has over world history. So the debate spills over into other theological commitments.

Lydia McGrew
Is it your position that presuppositionalism per se contains a position on the meaning of the ages of the antediluvians?

Because I would bet there are presuppers who would disagree with you on that.

I was under the impression that presuppositionalism had various issues where various interpretations of Scripture's literalness was allowed in a generally evidential manner just as it is for evidentialists, not that presuppositionalism *per se* is committed to a more literal hermeneutic.

For example, I think there are presupp OECs as well as presupp YECs.

(I'm inclined to take the ages of the antediluvians as literal, btw.)

Maybe we should distinguish presuppers from "people who take some non-evidentialist approach to apologetics." Perhaps one wouldn't say William Lane Craig is a presupper. See my comment below. He's not an evidentialist, though. But evidently the "internal witness of the Holy Spirit" isn't telling him that Genesis 1-11 are not "mytho-history," even though the IWHS is telling him that the Bible as a whole is true!

So it's not just hypothetical but actual for someone to have a commitment, even what that person characterizes as a whole-book, non-evidentialist commitment, to the truth of the Bible as Scripture, and to reinterpret segments as non-historical in fairly radical ways just as you are bringing up here, even more so than a given evidentialist (like me) does. Again, this isn't just a hypothetical scenario.

steve
i) When I contrast presuppers with evidentialists, that doesn't mean I'm exempting classical apologists (e.g. Craig)

from the contrast. I'm just using evidentialism as a representative point of contrast.

ii) Especially among the laity, some Christians appeal to the IWHS as a hermeneutical shortcut. The Holy Spirit gives Spirit-filled Christians the correct interpretation of Scripture.

However, that's just folk theology. The Bible itself never makes that promise. It's convenient for lay Christians who don't have access to academic Bible commentaries or the aptitude to process them. But the appeal is misguided.

iii) In terms of historical theology, the IWHS wasn't used as a hermeneutical shortcut but to undergird the assurance of salvation and/or conviction that the Bible is the word of God.

On the one hand, the principle has some value, possibly indispensable, because most Christians lack the aptitude to justify their faith through rigorous argumentation, so they must have an alternate mode of access to ground their faith. For a fairly sophisticated formulation of the IWHS:

https://www.proginosko.com/2017/01/the-internal-testimony-of-the-holy-spirit/

iv) However, the IWHS, if valid as a general principle, is too coarse-grained to function as a criterion for the canonical candidates (or textual criticism).

We might compare it to the argument from miracles, which eliminates conventional naturalism, and creates a presumption in favor of Christianity compared to non-Christian religions (because miracles cluster around Christianity), but is too indiscriminate to eliminate intra-Christian rivals.

v) In principle, the IWHS isn't the only epistemological paradigm that could perform the role assigned to it. An alternative might be a providential paradigm where God instils Christian faith by arranging for people to be exposed to good religious conditioning, as well as miracles, special providences, or answered prayers.

vi) The IWHS could be expanded into the argument from religious experience.

vii) As you know, "reinterpreting" the Bible is sometimes a euphemism for "the Bible got it wrong", but it would be controversial to say that, so a reinterpretation is more politic.

viii) As I said before, the primary issue isn't reinterpretation per se, but what motivates reinterpretation. If I question or reject a traditional interpretation, I didn't personally change my mind. That interpretation was around long before I was born. Every new Christian generation must assess traditional interpretations. Christians in different times and places may find themselves in different epistemic situations. A cliche example is geocentrism.

ix) Moreover, it's not always a case of revising the interpretation under pressure from factual challenges. For instance, biblical archeology may provide new evidence that invites an alternative interpretation.

x) My primary target is an approach to Scripture like the Jesus Seminar. A color-coded Bible in which we go through the Bible rating various statement as probably true, probably false, definitely false.

And that also happens under the guise of "reinterpretation," where reinterpreting a passage of Scripture is functionally equivalent to saying it's wrong. The revised interpretation is face-saving device.

This dovetails with your criticism of token inerrancy, where lip-service is paid to inerrancy but the affirmation is vacuous because it strips historicity out of inerrancy. Inerrancy becomes an empty suit.

Lydia McGrew
Just thought of this: Bill Craig has critiqued evidentialism and doesn't consider himself an evidentialist, and he's out there saying that Gen. 1-11 is "mytho-history." I don't know if you just think WLC is an outlier or something, but he really is an example of someone who both a) has distanced himself explicitly from evidentialism (I guess he'd be more of a Plantingian in certain ways) and b) has engaged in reinterpretation in exactly the way you are talking about and, I would say, for the same motives, though perhaps he would dispute the motive claim.

I don't really think he's all that unusual among non-evidentialists and anti-evidentialists. But perhaps you're just making generalizations about presuppositionalists more narrowly conceived and saying that those in that group are more inclined to stick with a more literal hermeneutic and not to engage in reinterpretation based on outside evidence or judgements of probability than self-styled evidentialists.

The inner testimony of the Spirit

1. Appeal to the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit (hereafter the "witness of the Spirit," to simplify) figures in some apologetic encounters or schools of thought. It was important in early Protestant theology. It's a fixture of Reformed theology. It's clearly a big deal in charismatic theology. It's an element of folk theology, often abused, but there are philosophical theologians like Alvin Plantinga and William Lane Craig who also champion the principle.

For Catholic theologians, this might seem to be an ad hoc appeal, concocted out of thin air to short-circuit debate. However, the principle has some basis in Scripture. The classic passages are Rom 8:16 & Gal 4:6. At least the wording of the phrase is based on the Pauline prooftexts. And these have a counterpart in Jn 10:27 & 1 Jn 2:20,27.

2. The witness of the Spirit is an aspect of defensive apologetics rather than offensive apologetics. It appeals to the experience of insiders, Christians, rather than outsiders, unbelievers. In my observation, the witness of the Spirit is invoked in three or four distinct, but related contexts, to prove:

- Christianity
- the Bible
- the canon
- salvation

3. In terms of the Pauline prooftexts, these have immediate reference to personal consciousness of salvation. A

supernatural self-awareness that the individual is saved. As such, the claim is narrower than the truth of Christianity in general, or the Bible in general.

At this same time, it has logical implications for larger claims. Christian salvation is only meaningful in a larger Christian paradigm of sin, the condition of the lost, damnation, forgiveness, and redemption. So the witness of the Spirit does have implications for the truth of the Gospel and Christianity in general. But can that be extended to adjudicate every theological dispute? No.

4. Then we have the related, but somewhat enigmatic passages in Jn 10:27 & 1 Jn 2:20,27. The scope of these passages seems to be broader than the Pauline prooftexts.

How do the sheep recognize the voice of Jesus? It doesn't say.

1 Jn 2:20,27 posit an anointing. Anointing with olive oil was a religious rite that became a picturesque metaphor for a "charism" of the Holy Spirit. In 1 John, the point of contrast are heretics who rebel against John's apostolic teaching and disfellowship the churches he pastored or supervised.

The anointing is not an alternative to apostolic teaching. To treat the anointing as a substitute for apostolic teaching would moot John writing in the first place! Rather, John seems to attribute to the anointing a supernatural ability to discern the truth of apostolic teaching, in contrast to the heretics. Not a revelation in terms of propositional information, but a revelation in the sense of the spiritual perception that apostolic teaching is true. And related to that, an ability to discriminate between the truth of apostolic teaching and the false teaching of the heretics.

The heretics may well have included false prophets who said the Spirit spoke to them and gave them the true message. If so, John is countering that.

It's unclear how far we can take this appeal because these are tersely worded promises. I think these are open to different models. So we might explore different models, consistent with, but underdetermined by the text.

5. Apropos (4), the witness of the Spirit might be classified under the argument from religious experience. Most Christians lack the aptitude and training to make a philosophically rigorous case for Christianity. In addition, you have Christians in closed countries where Christianity is illegal, who lack access to the apologetic resources available to American Christians. They do well just to have a Bible. So if Christianity is true, God must have a way of making known to garden-variety Christians that this is something they are supposed to believe. And this typically involves certain kinds of religious experience. That can takes many forms. A recognizable answer to prayer. An arresting special providence. A miracle.

Those are external signs. But Paul and John are referring to a psychological experience. Let's approach this from the opposite end of the spectrum. Suppose God tells me to lay hands on someone in a wheelchair and pray for their healing. I hear an audible voice. Sentences. And this message carries with it the conviction that if I do so, God will hear my prayer. I do so and the invalid is miraculously healed.

That scenario involves private revelation in the form of explicit information in addition to conviction. Let's vary the hypothetical. Suppose I see someone in a wheelchair. I suddenly feel that I should go over and pray for them. An

overwhelming sense that I'm supposed to do this. And it carries the conviction that if I do so, they will be healed.

Not just the sense that I should go over and introduce myself and ask permission to pray for them, as a matter of Christian charity. But a sense of compulsion, as if God is commanding me to do it, even though there is no audible verbal command. I do it, and they are miraculously healed.

In that scenario, I wasn't given any information. It wasn't a propositional revelation. I felt compelled to do it. Something I was supposed to do. I was convinced that if I did so, the invalid would be miraculously healed. And that's what happened.

So my conviction turned out to be true. And not accidentally true. Not a stroke of luck. Rather, God impelled me to take that action.

Did my conviction amount to knowledge? Did I know the invalid was going to be healed? It was a nonpropositional revelation. There was no promise or prediction. Yet the outcome corresponded to the conviction. And did so by divine design.

So that might be analogous to supernatural discernment that Christianity is true, even though it doesn't involve any new or additional information. Rather, a supernatural recognition that the information you already have is true.

Take another illustration. I'm booked to fly out of town tomorrow. The night before, God tells me not to board that plane. An audible voice. A verbal prohibition. So I cancel my flight and reschedule.

Now let's vary the illustration. I have a very vivid dream the night before that after I'm aboard and the plane takes off, it catches fire in midair.

After I wake up I ponder whether that's a premonition. Maybe it's just a dream. Maybe I should take my chances. I shrug it off. But the next day, as I'm walking through the terminal to my gate, it looks exactly like my dream, even though I've never been to this airport before. So I skip my flight. And the plane explodes in midair.

Now that's revelatory, but it's a visionary rather than a verbal revelation. I don't receive any information in the propositional sense. There's no explicit warning or prohibition. But it does provide evidence about the future. And the revelation corresponds to what happens. So there's a match between my conviction and reality. Moreover, that's not just a coincidence.

Let's vary the illustration one more time. I have the dream. This time I don't see the airport terminal in my dream. I just see myself inside the plane when it catches on fire, passengers screaming.

I go to the airport, but change my mind at the last minute. I'm spooked by the dream. I have nothing of consequence to lose if I miss my flight but everything to lose if it's a premonition. I take this to be a possible divine warning. And, in fact, the plane explodes.

This is a case of something I was shown rather than told. And it didn't rise to the level of a strong conviction. Instead, it gave me a sense of foreboding. And as I got closer to the gate, the sense of dread intensified. As it turned out, my apprehension was justified. A divine-induced, future-oriented attitude.

Now the prooftexts suggest certitude or something close to certitude. This example is weaker. It is, however, a hypothetical example of nonpropositional revelatory discernment. A mental state warranted both by the supernatural cause and the corresponding circumstances.

Knowing more than we can prove

A response I left on Facebook

1. Most Christians aren't intellectuals (like most humans generally–including most atheists). They are not able to make a philosophically rigorous case for Christianity.

So if Christianity is true, God must have a way of making known to garden-variety Christians that this is something they are supposed to believe. And this typically involves certain kinds of religious experience. Growing up in Christian communities (e.g. church, Christian family). God cultivates faith in Christianity through sociological means (among other factors).

They may just find the Bible compelling. And the Bible does contain evidence for its own veracity, even if they lack the sophistication to tease that out.

There may be other aspects of religious experience like a recognizable answer to prayer, an uncanny auspicious providence, an overwhelming (albeit temporary) sense of God's presence, or in some cases a miracle, that undergirds their faith.

We need to distinguish between raw evidence and formal argument. In addition, the "internal witness of the Spirit" can be a label or placeholder for variations on religious experience, some of which are probative. Having good reasons for what you believe, and the ability to articulate your reasons, are not to be confused.

2. I assume that you are in part alluding to this post:

http://www.craigkeener.com/epistemology-and-historical-arguments-a-few-thoughts/

I generally agree with what Keener says in that post.

3. There's the question of what the "inner testimony of the Holy Spirit" meant in historical theology.

4. Speaking for myself, I'm not equipped with an internal detector that clues me into which reported biblical incidents are fictional or factual. I don't appeal to the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit in that sense.

5. I agree with the principle that one way to evaluate the historicity of particular reports is not based on direct evidence for each report, but corroborative evidence for the source. The cliche argument is that if the source is reliable in cases where we have corroborative evidence, then there's a presumption that it's reliable in cases where we don't have corroborative evidence. Especially for ancient documents where only a random sample of confirmatory evidence survives. We don't require corroboration for every individual report. We only require enough corroboration to demonstrate the document is generally trustworthy. I think that's a valid principle as far as it goes.

But while that provides warranted belief, it's weaker than what NT faith obligates. So it needs to be supplemented. Or perhaps that's a supplement to other things.

6. As you know, there are multiple lines of evidence for the Gospels. There's the kind of archeological evidence recently marshaled by Peter Williams. There's the argument from undesigned coincidences which the McGrews have refined and expanded. There's Lydia's more recent argument from unnecessary details. There's the argument from prophecy.

7. I also think the argument from religious experience is germane to the credibility of the Gospels. My personal experience and experience of other Christians I know. In other words, evidence that we live in the same kind of world as the world depicted in the Bible. Not just public evidence.

8. How do you understand and integrate passages like Rom 8:16, Gal 4:6, Jn 10:27, & 1 Jn 2:20,27 into your evidentialist epistemology?

A priori inerrancy

Lydia McGrew continues to do presentations and interviews on her recent book **The Mirror or the Mask**:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMdIENUFTGM

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmAjVeGCG78

In the webinar, Lydia draws a distinction between two different approaches to inerrancy: a priori and inductive (1:41-42 min.)

She rejects both, but she's more sympathetic to the inductive approach. That's consistent with her evidentialist epistemology. I think it's safe to say that if she *was* an inerrantist, she'd be an inductive inerrantist rather than an a prior inerrantist. She draws a similar distinction in **The Mirror and the Mask**:

> Most of the time the term "inerrancy" refers to an a priori approach in which one assumes for theological reasons related to the doctrine of inspiration that the biblical documents are inerrant (in their original MSS). That certainly doesn't describe me. I think we have to see whether or not there are errors by investigation (52).

What's striking, though, is that she's not opposed to a priori inerrancy in principle. In her interview with Phil Fernandes, she says

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hrek9fQnx1w

> I don't think Jesus was mistaken about anything. Jesus was God, so I never say Jesus just made a mistake (1:15-16 min).

So here she takes the position that Jesus is inerrant by virtue of his deity. But that's a priori inerrancy, which assumes for theological reasons related to Christology that the teaching of Christ is inerrant.

Yet that raises the question of why a priori inerrancy is consistent with evidentialist epistemology when indexed to the person of Christ but inconsistent when indexed to Scripture. Why does the deity of Christ entail or warrant a priori inerrancy but divine inspiration does not?

It's true, of course, that God uses human agents in the process of inspiration, but by the same token, God uses human agency in the Incarnation. In both cases there's a human medium, as well as divine agency behind the human medium, operating through the human medium.

Inerrancy and evidentialism

It's not uncommon for competing theological traditions to evolve and become increasingly divergent over time. For instance, there are now options in "evangelical" freewill theism that used to be considered liberal or out-of-bounds in the past, viz. purgatory, annihilationism, open theism, evolution, universalism, inclusivism, homosexuality.

We may be seeing the same development in apologetics. There's an emerging pattern where, as evidentialism and prepositionalism continue to evolve and diverge, presuppositionalism is defined in part by commitment to inerrancy while evidentialism and classical apologetics are now defined in part by a noncommittal position on inerrancy. To some degree this seems to reflect a generational shift from old-guard evidentialism/classical theism.

I wonder how characteristic this will become moving forward. Will presuppositionalists be the only defenders of inerrancy as a matter of principle, while the rival schools regard that as expendable or a drag factor we're better off without?

I am struck by the casual way in which traditional evangelical commitment to inerrancy is being sidelined, as though revelation and inspiration are unimportant to the nature of the Christian faith.

Should a Christian debater bracket his beliefs?

A recent exchange I had with a fellow Christian apologist:

Rob
It is, of course, possible that one or more of the Gospels is mistaken in this matter.

Hays
Have the two positions evolved and diverged to the point where presuppositionalism is defined in part by commitment to inerrancy while evidentialism is now defined in part by lack of commitment to inerrancy?

Rob
When I say that it is "possible," I am speaking hypothetically and not about my own view.

That having been said, if we are to engage skeptical views of the Bible honestly, we must be ready to acknowledge that in some instances there might be a plausible argument for an error in Scripture. As an evangelical, I maintain that if we knew enough about what was going on in problematic passages we would see that there are no errors, but that's different from claiming that we always have enough such information to show decisively that there are no errors.

Hays
i) It's true that inerrancy doesn't require us to have a solution at hand for every difficulty. I think some inerrantists try too hard to explain how apparent errors/contradictions aren't really erroneous or

contradictory. The effort can backfire if it the explanation looks strained, ad hoc, and desperate.

Much better to say it's unreasonable to expect that we should have an explanation for every obscurity in Scripture, given our distance from the events.

ii) That said, I'm somewhat unclear on how your statements go together. On the one hand you indicate that as an inerrantist, you don't actually think it's possible that one (or more) of the Gospels is mistaken on this point.

On the other hand, when you tell the skeptic that, hypothetically, it's possible that one (or more) of the Gospels is mistaken on this point, as a persuasive apologetic strategy (assuming that's what you mean), it suggests that you yourself think is wrong. But presumably the job of a Christian apologist is to defend and promote what he thinks is really the case. Our beliefs should map onto reality. We don't want to offer the skeptic an alternative that's not really the case, do we? We don't want to propose, as a fallback position, a falsehood as a substitute for reality. If the Bible, as the word of God, shares in God's infallibility, then our job is to defend that reality, and not an unreal substitution.

Rob
It is a perfectly understandable feature of rational discourse to state that something is 'possible' that one happens not to think is actually the case."=

Hays
But inerrancy derives from a doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration. While the dictionary definition of "inerrancy" is without error, the actual concept is infallibility, by virtue of inspiration. I think "inerrancy" has edged out "infallibility" in

common usage because it has fewer syllables, which makes it easier to say. But the traditional orthodox concept is to be without *possibility* of error.

Rob
When speaking in the context of discussing the historical reliability of the text of an historical narrative in Scripture, where other participants in the discussion do not accept the divine inspiration of Scripture (and certainly not its inerrancy), to say that it is "possible" that a text is in error is to be understood in that context in which no commitment is being assumed with regard to the inerrancy of the text. I'm just not going to be so pedantic as to repeat "If we don't assume biblical inerrancy" before every comment on an apparent problem in Scripture.

Hays
i) Even when–or *especially* when–dealing with skeptics, it's important for them to understand what the Christian position represents. An apologist is a Christian spokesman, explaining the Christian position. An apologist ought to have a commitment to orthodox Christian theology. That's a given. That's understood. Skeptics should expect that from a Christian apologist.

ii) Of course, that's not their own viewpoint, but that doesn't mean he should accommodate their viewpoint. Rather, he should argue for his own viewpoint. No commitment should be assumed in the sense that he can't expect them to grant inerrancy. And he can't merely assert it to be the case. Likewise, inerrancy/inspiration needn't be the first stage of the argument. Rather, it can be the goal of the argument. The final stage he's aiming for and working towards.

iii) It's not begging the question for a Christian apologist to operate with that presumptive commitment–inasmuch as he does have reasons for that commitment. It's not a bare or sheer assumption, but a well-grounded commitment.

Rob
Even if my immediate purpose is to defend the inerrancy of the Bible, doing so in a way that precludes a priori even considering the possibility of an error is unlikely to be a persuasive strategy. We will come across as refusing to consider any potential contrary evidence to our dogma. I don't think that's a winning approach.

Hays
i) The primary obligation of a Christian apologist should be to uphold and defend theological reality. He ought do his best to make a rational case, but representing and defending Christianity can't be hostage to the plausibility structure of the unbeliever. By definition, the unbeliever is unreasonable to some degree. In many cases, intransigently unreasonable.

ii) The standard of comparison must always be reality–including theological reality–and not what the unbeliever is prepared to accept. In a debate with a Hindu or Buddhist philosopher, is a Christian apologist supposed to bracket empirical evidence just because an Indian philosopher may regard the sensible world or physical universe as illusory or delusive (*Maya*)? No, you have to stand your ground and defend reality rather than offering him a substitute for reality, an option that doesn't square with what the real world is like.

Consider a debate with an eliminative materialist. Is no commitment to be assumed with regard to consciousness in a debate between a dualist and an eliminative materialist?

Hardly. The dualist will argue for his side of the position. He won't bracket consciousness to accommodate the eliminative materialist.

iii) We can acknowledge prima facie evidence against our position. But that in itself doesn't concede the possibility of error. After all, many things are true that may appear to be false. So that by itself creates no presumption that something is false.

Is it improper to argue evidentially for the Resurrection?

A friend asked me to comment on an old article by the late Greg Bahnsen:

https://answersingenesis.org/apologetics/the-impropriety-of-evidentially-arguing-for-the-resurrection/

> However, a serious difficulty arises when the epistemological significance of the resurrection is separated from its soteriological function. It is correct to hold that God's raising of Jesus from the dead saves us both from sin and agnosticism, but it would be mistaken to understand by this that the epistemological problem could be handled independently of the (broader) moral problem which is at its base. It is with regret that one notices neo-evangelicals severing the justifying efficacy of Christ's resurrection from its truth-accrediting function. In reality, the latter is dependent upon the former. Only as Christ's resurrection (with its ensuing regeneration by the Holy Spirit of Christ) saves a sinner from his rebellion against God and God's Word, can it properly function to exhibit evidence for God's truthfulness.

i) The significance of the Resurrection is multifaceted, so it's a question of which facet it is deployed to prove. It has a soteriological value but also evidential value. By raising Jesus from the dead, the Father vindicates the mission of Jesus, confirming who he claims to be. If Jesus was a false prophet, God would leave him to rot in the grave.

ii) The reversal of death is an overwhelming phenomenon, in addition to the implicit promise of immortality.

> Evangelicals are often prone to generate inductive arguments for the veracity of Christianity based on the historical resurrection of Christ, and such arguments occupy central importance in this apologetic. It is felt that if a man would simply consider the "facts" presented and use his common reasoning sense he would be rationally compelled to believe the truth of Scripture. In such a case the evidences for Christ's resurrection are foundational to apologetical witnessing, whereas their only proper place is confirmatory of the believer's presupposed faith. There is a certain impropriety about attempting to move an opponent from his own circle into the circle of Christian belief by appealing to evidence for the resurrection, and there are many reasons why the evidentialist's building a case for Christianity upon neutral ground with the unbeliever ought to be avoided.

i) Bahnsen never says what he means by "neutral ground." Presumably the point of contrast is "All facts are created facts which can be properly understood only when given the interpretation the Creator intends"

ii) Due to common grace, some unbelievers are more reasonable than others. They retain more common sense.

> The Christian cannot relinquish his submission to God's authority in order to reason upon some alleged neutral ground. God makes a radical demand on the believer's life which involves never demanding proof of God or trying Him. Even the Incarnate Son would not put God to the test, but rather relied upon the inscripturated

> word (cf. Matthew 4). The Christian does not look at the evidence impartially, standing on neutral ground with the unbeliever, waiting to see if the evidence warrants trust in God’s truthfulness or not. Rather, he begins by submitting to the truth of God, preferring to view every man as a liar if he contradicts God’s Word (cf. Romans 3:4). No one can demand proof from God, and the servant of the Lord should never give in to any such demand (and obviously, neither should he suggest that such a demand be made by the unbeliever). The apostles were certainly not afraid of evidence; yet we notice that they never argued on the basis of it. They preached the resurrection without feeling any need to prove it to the skeptics; they unashamably appealed to it as fact. They explained the meaning of the resurrection, its significance, its fulfillment of prophecy, its centrality in theology, its redemptive power, its promise and assuring function-but they did not attempt to prove it by appealing to the “facts” which any “rational man” could use as satisfying scholarly requirements of credibility. By trying to build up a proof of the resurrection from unbiased grounds, the Christian allows his witness to be absorbed into a pagan framework and reduces the antithesis between himself and the skeptic to a matter of a few particulars. The Christian worldview differs from that of unbelief at every point (when the skeptic is consistent with his avowed principles), and it is the only outlook which can account for factuality at all. The Christian apologete must present the full message of Christ with all of its challenge and not water it down in order to meet the unbeliever on his own faulty grounds.

i) There's a difference between the viewpoint of a Christian apologist and the viewpoint of an unbeliever. An apologist can't expect or require an unbeliever to buy into the

complete Christian package at this preliminary stage of the argument. That framework can guide the strategy of the apologist, but he will often leave many things in reserve.

ii) We're not demanding proof from God or putting him to the test. Rather, we're working with the evidence he has provided. There's nothing wrong with arguing from or for the evidence. That's explaining the evidence and debunking unreasonable interpretations. There's nothing wrong with defending the evidence against irrational attacks.

iii) Eyewitness disciples were in a different epistemic position than we are, so there will be some adjustments in the apologetic. We are working with reports.

> Secondly there is a myriad of methodological problems which afflict an evidential argument for the resurrection, which is foundational rather than confirmatory of a presupposition. We note immediately that an inductive (historical) argument rests for its validity on the premise of uniformity (past and present) in nature; this makes possible a consideration of an analogy of circumstance. Yet the very point which the evidentialist is trying to prove is that of miracle, i.e. discontinuity. So, he is enmeshed in using a principle of continuity to establish the truth of discontinuity! When the evidentialist seeks to exhibit that the resurrection very probably occurred as a unique truth-attesting sign, he is divided against himself.

In general, the natural world operates like a machine. Against that background, miracles are conspicuous because a miraculous outcome is not predictable when nature is free to take its course. Rather, miracles imply the intervention of supernatural agents outside the machinery to change the expected outcome.

> Furthermore, since inductive argumentation is dependent upon the premise of uniformity, and since this premise can only be established by a Christian presupposing the truth of Scripture (for Hume's skepticism has yet to be countered on anything but presuppositional grounds), the "evidentialist's" argument is really presuppositional at base anyway. The non-Christian has no right to expect regularity in nature and the honest skeptic knows it; so, an inductive argument for the historical resurrection could only have been probative force for one who granted the truth of Christianity already.

It's true that induction presents a paradox for secular philosophy.

> Next, we observe that probability is statistically predicated of a series in which an event reoccurs on a regular basis; that is, general probability might be proven for a reoccurring event, but the resurrection of Christ is a one-time event. Can probability be predicated of a particular occurrence? Not normally.

i) According to the doctrine of the general Resurrection, It's not a one-time type of event but a universal phenomenon. The timing of Christ's resurrection is unique at this stage in history, but not unique in kind.

ii) It's true that many atheists raise a classic uncomprehending objection to the Resurrection by laying odds–as if this should be treated the same way as a naturally occurring event.

iii) However, another line of objection is not the odds of the event itself, but the odds that the Gospels falsely report the

Resurrection, or that reputed observers were mistaken. So the question of probabilities has more than one target.

> Again, we note that in recent years the crucial role of paradigms for factual argumentation has become evident (cf. T. S. Kuhn, **The Structure of Scientific Revolutions**). Facts are "facts" for particular theories in which they function; hence the fact of Christ's resurrection can be granted and understood only within the Christian paradigm or presupposition. The rules of evidence and argumentation are not the same for a Christian and non-Christian; they will have different authorities for final appeals, different standards of proof, different sets of considerations which are assumed to be crucially relevant, etc. Hence, a step by step argument from the supposition of the historical reliability in the resurrection accounts and its denial is not possible.

i) It's true that there's often not enough common ground between Christians and some unbelievers to make a case for the Resurrection that an unbeliever will find convincing. Some unbelievers are more hardened in naturalism and skepticism than others. Take commitment to methodological atheism. Some unbelievers have put themselves out of reach. It may not be possible to arrive at common criteria sufficient to make a case for the Resurrection that's mutually satisfactory to both sides. There may be no viable bridge. That's not a failure on the part of the Christian apologist.

ii) But this also raises the problem of the criterion. Which enjoys priority: criteria or paradigm examples? If you

witness a miracle, you don't begin with criteria but with the event itself.

> Another brief indication of difficulty in the evidentialist's attempt to establish the resurrection of Christ is found in the logic of the argument if it be taken as intending to prove the possibility of indeterminacy and oddity in the universe or history; such an argument would point to a world dominated by chance, whereas the Scriptures clearly present God as sovereignly controlling everything by the word of His power. If oddity and chance become the crux of one's apologetic, then he has forfeited the orthodoxy of his witness. Finally, once the evidentialist has failed to maintain that Christianity is the only adequate basis for a meaningful interpretation of historical facts and not simply a working hypothesis which is "as plausible" as the next with respect to isolated facts, and once he has lowered his sights by appealing to the probability of Scripture's truth, then he has left the door open for the skeptic's escape to considerations of possibility.

It's true that defending the Resurrection as a fluke or freak accident is a blind alley.

> If Christ only probably arose, then it is possible that the evidence adduced has a completely different interpretation; even if certain facts seem to point to the probable resurrection of Jesus, it is admitted that other evidence points to the disconfirmation of the gospel records! But this is not the Christian position, for according to it there is no possibility that Christ did not arise; this is a foundational, incorrigible fact as revealed in God's authoritative Word.

i) Here we need to distinguish between the probability of an event and the probability of an argument. There are often limits to what we can prove. I have many private memories of incidents in my life that I can't corroborate, but I know what happened.

ii) From a metaphysical standpoint, if the Resurrection happened at all, there's no possibility that it didn't happen. It was certain to happen by divine design.

iii) But from a epistemological standpoint, the issue is whether our records are possibly wrong. That's a different issue.

iv) I don't think it's necessary or realistic for a Christian apologist to assign odds to the case for the Resurrection. We simply marshal the available evidence. It is what it is. There's no need to conjure up an artificial statistic regarding the degree of probability.

v) I'd add, as I've mentioned on several occasions, that there's an overemphasis on scrutinizing ancient documentary evidence. While that foundation is indefensible, Christianity is a living religion with a living Savior. Jesus answers prayer. Jesus appears to people. That's not just a thing of the past, recorded in old books.

> Now, even if the above considerations were put aside for a moment, we would still have to see that the evidential argument for Christ’s resurrection is unsuitable as the crux for our apologetic. Under cross-examination most of the considerations brought forth by evidentialists can be dismissed as overstated, gratuitous, or inconclusive. There is little if any basis for holding to a resurrection as probably taking place in the past and arguing that the witnesses are probably

> reliable is a completely different matter. It is also unsuitable for the intended aim of the argument, for the very place that the witnesses could be mistaken, deceptive, or distorted might be the very event under question! But even putting aside these things, the evidentialist may prove the historical resurrection of Christ, but he proves that it is simply an isolated and uninterpreted "freak" event in a contingent universe. He is still stranded on the far side of Lessing's ditch (i.e., the skeptic can grant that Christ arose and then simply ask what that odd, ancient fact has to do with his own present life and experience). The fact that Christ rose from the dead does not prove anything within the neutral framework of an evidentialist's argument.

It proves something highly significant about the kind of world we live in.

> Christ's resurrection does not entail his deity, just as our future resurrection does not entail our divinity! And one could not argue that the first person to rise from the dead is God, for on that basis Lazarus would have greater claim to deity than Christ! The evidentialist may prove the resurrection of Jesus, but until he proves every other point of Christianity, then resurrection is an isolated, irrelevant, "brute" fact which is no aid to our apologetical efforts. Only within the system of Christian logic does the resurrection of Christ have meaning and implication; and that system of logical entailment and premises can only be used on a presuppositional basis-you do not argue into it.

That's too ambitious and quite artificial. Take the actual eyewitnesses to the Resurrection. They didn't prove every other point of Christianity to acknowledge and be

revolutionized by what they saw. They didn't have to operate within an explicit system of Christian logic. They understood death. They understood how the world normally works. And they had a Jewish theological framework to provide a necessary context.

> In terms of the evidentialist’s approach to the unbeliever, that skeptic can accept the resurrection without flinching, for the resurrection is simply a random fact until a Christian foundation has been placed under it.

That's a hypothetical postulate with virtually no representatives–and for good reason. A throwaway scenario.

> Furthermore, in the past men like Reimarus and Paulus have utilized the same enlightened, scientific methodology as that of evidentialism and have concluded that Christ could not have risen from the dead. It is terribly unwise for the Christian to stake his apologetic on the shifting sands of “scientific” scholarship.

It's true that a Christian apologist should be prepared to challenge the assumptions of "scientific" scholarship.

Scripture itself should be enough to dissuade a person from depending upon evidential arguments for Christ’s resurrection. God’s Word makes clear that man’s rebellion against the truth is morally, not intellectually, rooted. The sinner needs a changed heart and spiritually opened eyes, not more facts and reasons. Moreover, proving the resurrection as a historical fact would have no effect as far as engendering belief in God’s Word. The only tool an apologete needs is the Word of God, for the sinner will

either presuppose its truth and find Christianity to be coherent and convincing (given his spiritual condition and past experience) or he will reject it and never be able to come to a knowledge of the truth. “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:31). God’s Word is sufficient in giving the sinner the necessary witness which can lead him to conversion; if he will not hear the inspired Word of God, neither will he be moved by a human argument for the resurrection. A proof of the resurrection is certainly no more powerful than the living and bodily presence of the resurrected Savior before one’s own eyes; yet we learn from Matthew 28:17 that even some of the eleven disciples of Christ doubted while in His resurrected presence! When one is not ready to submit to God’s self-attesting Word, no amount of evidence can persuade him-even compelling evidence for Christ’s resurrection. When Christ met with two travelers on the road to Emmaus and found them doubtful about the resurrection, He rebuked them for being slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken (Luke 24:25). Rather than offering them compelling evidence for His resurrection (by immediately opening their eyes to recognize Him), He made their hearts burn within them by expounding to them the Scriptures.

i) But the Scriptures were not enough. Disciples had to actually witness the Risen Lord to be convinced.

ii) An apologist has no control over the mindset of the unbeliever. Either God will open the eyes of the unbeliever or not. The duty of an apologist is simply to marshal the evidence that God has put at our disposal and leave the results to God.

Inerrancy and evidentialism

I hesitate to do another post on the evidentialist/presuppositionalist debate because I don't wish to belabor the issue, but when I happen to be thinking about something, I tend to do a series of posts on the same topic because that's what I have on my mind. So here's one more post.

I recently said I like the evidentialist menu. In addition, evidentialists produce a lot of firstrate apologetic material.

However, a fundamental problem with evidentialism is its neutrality or noncommittal attitude about inerrancy. An evidentialist can affirm or deny inerrancy. Both positions are consistent with evidentialism.

But once you surrender inerrancy, you're free to surrender other biblical teachings. Anything that you feel is too awkward or inconvenient to defend. Anything that might be a stumbling block to people coming to the faith. Anything you yourself would like to get rid of.

The problem with that attitude is that evidentialism makes Christianity theologically unstable. It suffers from an identity crisis. There's no built-in limit on what biblical teachings you can jettison. It comes down to your personal assessment of what constitutes the core of Christianity. The underlying problem is that evidentialism fails to take seriously the nature of Christianity as a revealed religion.

By contrast, presuppositionalists don't treat biblical teachings as negotiable and expendable. Now we might ask if that's an implication of presuppositionalism or just a

reflection of the religious culture in which presuppositionalists operate.

I'd say it's an implication of presuppositionalism. Basically, evidentialists approach the Bible as historians while presuppositionalists approach the Bible as theologians. And presuppositionalists are right about that. Of course, that's not deny the historicity of Scripture. But Christianity is a religion. It's about God and God's relation to the world he made.

And it's not as if the Bible is a secular record of sacred history. Bible writers are agents of sacred history. They have a divine vocation in redemptive history. They aren't just spectators of divine activity in redemptive history; rather, God acts in them and through them as divine spokesmen and witnesses. In that regard, presuppositionalism has a more holistic and integrated viewpoint.

Has presuppositionalism evolved?

Has presuppositionalism evolved? By presuppositionalism I mean the Van Tilian tradition, not the Clarkian tradition– which is a different animal.

Van Til championed the transcendental argument. And think that's due in large part do his eccentric view of divine incomprehensibility (which builds paradox into his definition of divine incomprehensibility). If God is incomprehensible in Van Til's sense, then you can't argue directly for his existence. Rather, you argue that God's existence is a necessary condition for everything else. Van Til's view is similar in that respect to transcendental Thomism.

So Van Til's argument was essentially an epistemological argument for God's existence. Transcendental arguments are epistemological arguments, to refute skepticism.

However, in the hands of Greg Welty and James Anderson, the argument has shifted to modal metaphysics. So there's been some evolution and reorientation in the argument.

It may be the case that Kant's argument is more epistemological, in part because he doesn't have a robust theology to ground it. Kant might even be a closet atheist. And he's skeptical regarding our knowledge of the external world. So he can't say much of anything to back it up in terms of bedrock ontology.

Although Van Til's version is partly epistemological, he tries to ground it in the metaphysics of Reformed theism. Greg Welty and James Anderson develop that neglected potential in more detail. This is also because there's been a lot of work done on modal metaphysics which wasn't on the

horizon in Van Til's time. In addition, Welty was never a champion of theological paradox. And that's conspicuously missing from Bahnsen as well.

James Anderson on presuppositionalism

Here's an outstanding exposition and defense of Van Tilian presuppositionalism:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EguVuY5HVkA

I'll venture a few observations:

1. Let's begin with some definitions:

> As standardly conceived, transcendental arguments are taken to be distinctive in involving a certain sort of claim, namely that X is a necessary condition for the possibility of Y—where then, given that Y is the case, it logically follows that X must be the case too.
>
> https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendental-arguments/
>
> Transcendental arguments are partly non-empirical, often anti-skeptical arguments focusing on necessary enabling conditions either of coherent experience or the possession or employment of some kind of knowledge or cognitive ability, where the opponent is not in a position to question the fact of this experience, knowledge, or cognitive ability, and where the revealed preconditions include what the opponent questions. Such arguments take as a premise some obvious fact about our mental life—such as some aspect of our knowledge, our experience, our beliefs, or our cognitive abilities—and add a claim that some other state of affairs is a necessary condition of the first one. Transcendental arguments most commonly have been deployed against a position denying the knowability of

> some extra-mental proposition, such as the existence of other minds or a material world. Thus these arguments characteristically center on a claim that, for some extra-mental proposition P, the indisputable truth of some general proposition Q about our mental life requires that P.
>
> https://www.iep.utm.edu/trans-ar/

2. Apropos (1), Anderson defines presuppositionalism partly in terms of presenting an internal critique of non-Christian worldviews. One way of putting this is that non-Christian worldviews lack the metaphysical resources to provide the necessary enabling conditions for coherent experience or the possession or employment of some kind of knowledge or cognitive ability.

3. Is presuppositionalism circular? In a sense, but not viciously so. Take a transcendental argument which posits that knowledge/truth/human rationality possible, and Christian metaphysics provides the necessary enabling conditions. That's circular in the sense that it takes for granted the possibility of knowledge/truth/human rationality, but there's nothing fallacious or question-begging about that assumption. After all, what's the alternative? How would a critic *argue* that knowledge/truth/human rationality are impossible? Such a denial would be self-refuting. Although you can debate the degree to which knowledge is obtainable, or the degree to which human reason is truth-conducive, it would be self-referentially incoherent to deny those claims wholesale.

4. Anderson classifies transcendental arguments as deductive arguments. Once again, let's provide a definition:

A deductive argument is an argument that is intended by the arguer to be deductively valid, that is, to provide a guarantee of the truth of the conclusion provided that the argument's premises are true. This point can be expressed also by saying that, in a deductive argument, the premises are intended to provide such strong support for the conclusion that, if the premises are true, then it would be impossible for the conclusion to be false. An argument in which the premises do succeed in guaranteeing the conclusion is called a (deductively) valid argument. If a valid argument has true premises, then the argument is said also to be sound.

An inductive argument is an argument that is intended by the arguer to be strong enough that, if the premises were to be true, then it would be unlikely that the conclusion is false. So, an inductive argument's success or strength is a matter of degree, unlike with deductive arguments.

Although inductive strength is a matter of degree, deductive validity and deductive soundness are not. In this sense, deductive reasoning is much more cut and dried than inductive reasoning. Nevertheless, inductive strength is not a matter of personal preference; it is a matter of whether the premise ought to promote a higher degree of belief in the conclusion.

Because deductive arguments are those in which the truth of the conclusion is thought to be completely guaranteed and not just made probable by the truth of the premises, if the argument is a sound one, then we say the conclusion is "contained within" the premises; that is, the conclusion does not go beyond what the premises implicitly require.

> Because the difference between inductive and deductive arguments involves the strength of evidence which the author believes the premises provide for the conclusion, inductive and deductive arguments differ with regard to the standards of evaluation that are applicable to them.
>
> https://www.iep.utm.edu/ded-ind/

5. This is often a sticking point between evidentialists and presuppositionalists. For instance, Bahnsen is highly critical of the fact that inductive arguments only yield degrees of probability. They fall short of certainty. But a basic problem with Bahnsen's position is that inductive and deductive arguments from Christianity differ in scope. Inductive arguments include the Resurrection, the canon of scripture, the argument from prophecy, the biographical accuracy of the Gospels, the reliability of the Greek/Hebrew text of Scripture. Christian apologetics can't afford to eliminate inductive arguments of this kind. Christian transcendental arguments are limited in scope. So Christian apologetics requires a combination of inductive and deductive arguments.

6. That may seem to leave a unsatisfying gap between the two kinds of argument. However, they're not essentially at odds or separate. Christian transcendental arguments provide the necessary backing for Christian inductive arguments. They justify the enabling conditions on which inductive arguments depend. So you can still have certainty at that foundational level.

7. Finally, Anderson draws a distinction between knowledge and proof. Due to natural revelation, we intuitively know certain things independent of formal argumentation. So

there's a kind of certainty that's not contingent on our ability to formulate sound arguments.

What is presuppositionalism getting at?

There are different aspects to the evidentialist/presuppositionalist debate. Some of these are tedious and superficial.

One question is the role of transcendental arguments in Christian apologetics. Do these make a necessary contribution to Christian apologetics? I'd say they do.

Should they be the centerpiece of Christian apologetics? Here I'd demure. I think inductive arguments for the Resurrection, the canon of scripture, the argument from prophecy, the biographical accuracy of the Gospels, and the reliability of the Greek/Hebrew text of Scripture are more directly germane to the Christian faith than most transcendental arguments for God, so in that respect I think inductive arguments should be front and center.

But to some extent this is a matter of expertise. In the age of modern logic, with modal logic, Bayesian probability theory and other suchlike, formulating philosophically rigorous arguments for Christianity becomes a very technical exercise, and so you have philosophers who specialize on particular kinds of arguments (e.g. Pruss on the contingency argument, Collins on the fine-turning argument, Maydole on ontological arguments).

That said, presuppositionalism isn't primarily about apologetic methodology or even transcendental arguments. It runs much deeper than that. It's about the nature of God, reality, and God's relation to the world. What kinds of things rely on God for their existence? Is it confined to truths of fact and contingent entities, or does it include necessary truths, abstract objects, and moral realism? Are logic,

numbers, and possible worlds independent of God or do they have their grounding in God? A God who's the source of these things is a more fundamental being than a God who is not. A greater being. So this is ultimately about theology.

Sorting out presuppositionalism

The silly contest between Josh Rasmussen and SyeTenB demonstrates, once again, the need to do some sorting:

Regarding the YouTube interview:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zkcs-31PqFg&feature=youtu.be

There are at least three different things flying under the banner of "presuppositionalism"

1. There's the position of SyeTenB. He's a hack with a rabid internet following among a clique of pop Calvinist groupies.

2. That's not to be confused with academic versions of presuppositionalism. For instance:

Greg Welty, "The Conceptualist Argument," in Colin Ruloff (ed.), **Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology** (Bloomsbury Press, forthcoming).

https://www.proginosko.com/docs/The_Lord_of_Non-Contradiction.pdf

https://blog.epsociety.org/2013/09/responses-to-argument-for-god-from-logic.html

3. From another angle is the presuppositionalism of Vern Poythress. For instance:

https://frame-poythress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ChancePoythress.pdf

4. There are roughly two competing schools of thought that call themselves presuppositionalists:

i) One derives from Cornelius Van Til. Second-generation Van Tilians include John Frame, the late Greg Bahnsen, and Vern Poythress. We might classify James Anderson as a third-generation Van Tilian.

However, he's been exposed to some other influences, like Plantinga and modal metaphysics.

Theistic conceptual realism belongs to a family of transcendental arguments. It's interesting how that's evolved. Kant's argument is more epistemological, in part because he doesn't have a robust theology to ground it. Kant might even be a closet atheist. And he's skeptical regarding our knowledge of the external world. So he can't say much of anything to back it up in terms of bedrock ontology.

Although Van Til's version is partly epistemological, he tries to ground it in the metaphysics of Reformed theism.

Greg Welty and James Anderson have done a lot to embed the epistemological side of the argument in modal metaphysics. I think it's a transcendental argument with an epistemological side, but they've done more to model and detail the necessary metaphysical conditions that make it possible.

ii) The other derives from the late Gordon Clark. Clark as an anti-empiricist.

Clark's followers make second-order knowledge necessary for first-order knowledge. You don't know anything unless you know how you know it. They make the justification of

knowledge a necessary ingredient in knowledge itself. Here are two examples:

http://unapologetica.blogspot.com/2019/11/gordon-clark-and-necessity-of.html

http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2006/03/more-scripturalist-mumbo-jumbo.html

It's important to keep these two schools of thought separate, even though they both use the same designation. When you're accused of not understanding presuppositionalism, part of the problem is that there are competing schools of thought as well as different exponents with varying views.

I don't think Josh is under any obligation to understand SyeTenB's position because there's not much there there.

Why I'm still a Christian

I mentioned a while back that there's an overemphasis on Christian conversion testimonies. Why these can be edifying to read, what's more useful is to read follow-up testimonies of why someone is still a Christian after 50 years, give or take. Recently I ran that question by some Christian thinkers who are approaching the end of their pilgrimage. The answers for interesting but off-the-record. Then one of them asked me how I'd answer my own question. So, for what it's worth, here's the question and my own answer:

Q. Have you written anything about why you're a Christian at this stage of life? As you know, there's a testimonial genre about how people became Christian in their teens/twenties or how they personally embraced the faith they were raised in at that time of life, but that's frozen in the past. At that age their reasons will be thinner. Over a lifetime, the reasons may evolve or change or be augmented or replaced with deeper reasons. Approaching the end of life, a Christian thinker has thicker reasons for his faith, due to all the life-experience under his belt, study, reflection, and interaction with others.

A. There's why I became a Christian and then there's why I'm still a Christian. I've been a Christian for 44 years. I became a Christian at 16.

I grew up in a moderately Christian home. My father was intellectual, but agnostic and aloof. My mother was a P.K., pious, but religiously rootless when I was growing up. My grandmother, who lived in town until I started junior high, was the most devout. I adored her, but she wasn't intellectual, so her faith wasn't a *reason* for me to believe . My Aunt Grace was the best educated Christian I knew at

that time, but she was more scholarly than analytical. And we didn't see her that often. My uncle Fred, who was Dean of Education at Anderson U, was a closet apostate.

I never attended a fundamentalist church. We attended mainline denominations. No doctrinal preaching.

When I came of age around 13, I began to think about death. Not because I expected to die anytime soon, but I was beginning to think about what I'd do with the rest of my life as an adult. And since I was mortal, it made sense to mentally begin at the end and work back from there. At the time I was an atheist. However, it seemed to me that if we pass into oblivion when we die, then life is unimportant. It made me feel alienated from the world.

At that age I didn't have a philosophically astute argument for my intuition, but over the years I've definitely firmed up my view that atheism is a euphemism for moral and existential nihilism. Indeed, one of my pastimes is to collect atheists who admit that.

That didn't make me a Christian, but it did mean I've never been able to consider atheism as a viable fallback option. At one end, my Christianity begins with atheism. That's the backstop. That's just not a tenable alternative.

I became a Christian at 16 simply by reading the Bible, beginning with Matthew. That was it. Apologetics came later. I backed into apologetics, not to answer my own questions, but to advise others.

As a new Christian it became quickly apparent that I could ask questions the people I knew couldn't answer, so I'd have to find my own answers.

Although I'm cerebral, I'm naturally an intellectual drifter. I coasted through public school on raw talent. I was never studious.

Partly because I found public school boring. For instance, I was probably mathematically gifted, but they didn't know what to do with gifted students. They just taught techniques for solving problems, whereas I ignored the textbook and toyed with equations until they balanced out in my head. The teacher didn't approve.

Some guys excel academically because they have a competitive streak. I don't. I always thought living to beat the competition was a stupid goal in life. Until I became a Christian, I was an intellectually lazy, indifferent student. It took a sense of Christian duty to galvanize my abilities.

Theologically, I'm primarily interested in exegetical and philosophical theology. Intellectual challenges to Christianity have never been the chink in my armor. I've read all the best atheists.

In addition, I've invested a great amount of time in evidence for Christianity as well as evidence refuting naturalism, including neglected lines of evidence.

As you know, Christian faith has several components. One is belief or conviction, grounded in evidence. My faith is pretty invulnerable in that respect, although I'm only human, so I don't claim to be indestructible.

Where I'm vulnerable is the emotional problem of evil. The way to harm me is through harming those I care about. My three closest, most devout relatives suffered the most.

I think some Christians lose their faith, not because they cease to believe in God's existence, but God's benevolence. They feel God betrayed them or betrayed those they loved. If you doubt God's goodness, then his existence is secondary.

However, I'm a presuppositional Christian and an existential Christian. I think God is the source of meaning, math, modality, morality, and logic, as well as creation. On that front alone, naturalism is not an option.

In addition, I've never been a truth for truth's sake, follow the evidence wherever it leads thinker. That bifurcates the good and the true. But both are necessary. Without truth, goodness is illusory; without goodness, truth is worthless.

Watching what happened to my closest relatives was emotionally damaging to my faith, but damaged faith is worth clinging to. We can't live without hope.

So between the positive evidence for Christianity, as well as the evidence for the falsity of naturalism, I remain a Christian. Atheism is repellent, and the other religious offerings aren't serious rivals.

I should add that I've had a number of uncanny experiences over the years (as well as witnessing like phenomena with some of my relatives), so it's not confined to abstract public evidence.