

Philosophy of Religion

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Holy Scripture:

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. (Matthew 22:37-38)

*Thy lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens, Thy faithfulness to the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God; Thy judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O LORD. How precious is your lovingkindness, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of Thy wings. They feast on the abundance of Thy house, and you give them drink from the river of Thy delights. For with you is the fountain of life; **in Thy light do we see light.** (Psalm 36:5-9)*

Why Philosophy Matters

Because historically philosophy has provided a shaft of sunlight from realms transcendent

C.S. Lewis offers fascinating insight in a short piece entitled "*Meditation in a toolshed*".

I was standing today in the dark toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.

Then I moved, so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences."

"In Thy light...we see light..." (Psalm 36:9)

Let us consider three abstract metaphysical concepts that from ancient times have been described as the Three Transcendentals; Truth, Goodness & Beauty.

Let's take C.S. Lewis's thought and look along the beam of Truth, Goodness & Beauty as we open this class.

Traditionally, these three have been known as the Transcendentals because they are three qualities infinitely rooted in the very nature of god. Thus, they are equal in dignity, worth & objectivity.

In his stimulating article entitled, “*The Wound of Beauty*”, Gregory Wolfe says,

“In Christian thought there has always been a sense that the transcendental exists in something of a Trinitarian relationship to one another.”¹

Peter Kreeft begins his lecture entitled *The Good, True and Beautiful*, saying...

“There are three things that shall never die; truth, goodness and beauty. These are the three things we all need, and need absolutely, and know we need absolutely.

Our minds want, not only some truth and some falsehood, but all truth without limit. Our wills want not only some good and some evil, but all good without limit. Our desires, imaginations, sensibilities, feelings, wants or heart, want not some beauty and some ugliness, but all beauty without limit.

For these are the only three things we never get bored with, and never will for all eternity. Because they are three attributes of God and therefore of all God’s creation; three transcendental or absolutely universal properties of all reality.

All that exists is true, the proper object of mind. All that exists is good, the proper object of will. All that exists is beautiful, the proper object of the heart, or feelings, or desire, or sensibilities or imagination. This third area is much more difficult to define than the first two.

Every culture seeks these three things too. For man makes culture before culture makes man. Some cultures, however, like some individuals, specialize in one of the three transcendentals.

In the orient, India has specialized in the love of Truth; of ultimate mystical and metaphysical truth. China has specialized in the love of the Good, the practical good, whether Confucianism or Taoist or even Communist. Japan has specialized in the love of Beauty; especially the love of the Arts.

In the modern West, German culture... has specialized in Truth; especially philosophical and scientific Truth; American culture in the practical human Good; and English culture in Beauty.

Small islands, like Japan and England seem to resonate especially to the love of Beauty; perhaps because of the love of the sea; perhaps because of the appreciation of limits.” (Kreeft, “*The Good, True and Beautiful*”; transcript of lecture)

¹ Gregory Wolfe, *Imagejournal.org*, “The Wound of Beauty”, Issue 56, Winter 2007-2008

The human yearning after the transcendentals may be seen in the pursuit of Truth about reality through philosophy, in the pursuit of the Good through the prophets & moralists and in the pursuit of Beauty through the poets, artists, musicians and myth-makers.

The two greatest Christian writers and thinkers of the twentieth century perceived in ancient pagan mythology this longing of the human heart that responds to beauty. G.K. Chesterton in the *Everlasting Man*, and C.S. Lewis in the essay "*Myth become fact*", and in the books *Till We Have Faces* and *Perelandra*.

Lewis calls pagan myths "*gleams of celestial strength and beauty falling on jungles of filth and imbecility because they are based on a solid reality than we dream but are at almost an infinite distance removed from their base.*"²

Kreeft goes on to say, "God has not left Himself without witness in any of the three, distinctly human, more than animal powers of the soul; the three aspects of the image of God in us. The mind which knows and understands the good, the will which chooses and enforces it and the emotions which love and appreciate it."

In other words, the cognition, the volition and the affection; the three-fold structure of the soul; of personhood. We respond to truth, goodness and beauty.

We are this because we are images of God. Each of us is one person with three distinct powers. God is one God in three distinct Persons. The Son, the Logos, is the mind of the Father and performs His good will in redeeming the world. The Spirit is the life-giving poet. He composes and choreographs the operative love between the Father and the Son in both creating and redeeming. And thus He is the sanctifier. The Spirit is the saint-maker perfecting the mystical body of Christ which is the Church.

Kreeft argues that the "order of these three transcendentals of truth, goodness and beauty is ontologically founded. Truth is defined by 'being', for truth is the effulgence of 'being', the revelation of 'being', the word of being. Truth is not defined by consciousness which conforms to being in knowing it.

Goodness is defined by truth, not by the will; which is good when it conforms to the truth of being. And beauty is defined by goodness; objectively, real goodness. Not by subjective desire, or pleasure, or feeling, or imagination; all of which should conform to it.

The psychological order is the reverse of the ontological order. As we know being through first sensing appearances, so we are attracted to goodness first by its beauty. We are attracted to truth by its goodness. And we are attracted to 'being' by its truth.

But ontologically, truth depends on being, goodness on truth and beauty on goodness. Truth is knowing being; knowing He Who is ultimate reality. Goodness is true goodness.

² C.S. Lewis, in the essay *Myth become Fact* and the novels, *Till We Have Faces* and *Perelandra*

And the most beautiful thing in the world is perfect goodness... Though beauty is derivative from truth and goodness, it has the greatest power over our souls. This is why most addictions come from something that appears beautiful; whether Gollum's ring, a false 'precious', or a drug or alcohol high which is the false mystical experience, or a false love that apes married love but lacks its truth. And therefore the only effective cure for addiction must come from something that appears even more beautiful than the addiction. As Aquinas says, 'The only thing strong enough to overcome an evil passion is a more powerful good passion.' " (Kreeft, from transcript)

To ponder yet more deeply...

In the same article cited earlier, **Gregory Wolfe** says, "The thinker who has helped me most along these lines is the twentieth-century theologian **Hans Urs von Balthasar**. His argument—and it is a rather unsettling one—is that of the three Transcendentals, beauty is the one that is least troubled by our fallen condition. In a world plagued by sin and error, he says, truth and goodness are always hotly contested. How do you live righteously? What is the truth? As we debate these matters, we have axes to grind.

But beauty, von Balthasar says, is disinterested. It has no agenda. Beauty can sail under the radar of our anxious contention over what is true and what is good, carrying along its beam a ray of the beatific vision. Beauty can pierce the heart, wounding us with the transcendent glory of God."³

Observe again the insight of **C.S. Lewis** in his essay, "Meditation in a toolshed":
"Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences."

Existentialist author & philosopher **Albert Camus** wrote in his work *Notebooks*, "*Beauty is unbearable, drives us to despair, offering us for a minute the glimpse of an eternity that we should like to stretch out over the whole of time.*"

Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson in his work, *The Poet*, wrote, "*We fly to beauty as an asylum from the terrors of finite nature.*"

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in his short work entitled "Beauty will save the world", wrote...

"Dostoyevsky once let drop the enigmatic phrase: "Beauty will save the world." And so perhaps that old trinity of Truth and Good and Beauty is not just the formal outworn formula it used to seem to us during our heady, materialistic youth. If the crests of these three trees join together, as the investigators and explorers used to affirm, and if the too obvious, too straight branches of Truth and Good are crushed or amputated and cannot reach the light—yet perhaps the whimsical, unpredictable, unexpected branches of Beauty will make their way through and soar up to that very place and in this way perform the work of all three. And in that case it was not a slip of the tongue for

³ Wolfe, *ibid*.

Dostoyevsky to say that “Beauty will save the world,” but a prophecy. After all, he was given the gift of seeing much, he was extraordinarily illumined.”

Von Balthasar, in his magnum opus, *The Glory of the Lord*, speaks of the three transcendentals saying,

Beauty is the word which shall be our first. Beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect dares to approach since only it dances as an uncontained splendor around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another. Beauty is the disinterested one, without which the ancient world refused to understand itself, a word which both imperceptibly and unmistakably has bid farewell to our new world, a world of interests, leaving it to its own avarice and sadness. No longer loved or fostered by religion, beauty is lifted from its face as a mask, and its absence exposes features on that face which threaten to become incomprehensible to man. We no longer dare to believe in beauty, and we make of it a mere appearance in order the more easily to dispose of it. Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage and decision as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance. We can be sure that whoever sneers at her name, as if she were the ornament of a bourgeois past, whether he admits it or not, can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love.

To quote Gregory Wolfe again, “A quotation as dense with meaning as that is a hard act to follow. But one of the more intriguing suggestions made by von Balthasar concerns that “act of mysterious vengeance.” When you remove beauty from the human equation, it is going to come back in some other form, even as anti-beauty. A good deal of modern art can be understood in this light. In modernity, beauty has been seen as an appearance—ornamentation, sugar coating. Secularists and believers alike have either rejected beauty altogether or argued that beauty should make the pills of truth and goodness go down easier. Beauty must serve some other end; it is not an end in itself.

But the transcendentals were always understood as infinitely valuable, as ends in themselves. When it comes to beauty, however, we are afraid to assert that much. We feel the need to harness it, because beauty is unpredictable, wild.

Here’s how I have tried to comprehend these deep matters. If you think about these three transcendentals in relationship to our human capacities, what are the faculties that correspond to these three transcendentals? Goodness, I would say, has to do with faith, the desire for holiness. Truth is pursued by reason.

We are all familiar with that pairing: faith and reason. That’s standard-issue language in the western tradition. But what about the third element? What faculty does beauty correspond to? I would suggest that it is the imagination. The imagination is the faculty honed to apprehend beauty and unfold its meaning.

How often do we say the Judeo-Christian tradition is a tradition of faith, reason, and imagination? This is what I mean by saying that we treat beauty as the Cinderella. “Go make pretty pictures,” we say to beauty, “but don’t start acting like you are a pathway to knowing the universe.”

Yet this is precisely what the definition of a transcendental means. That’s easy to see when it comes to truth. But the same applies to goodness: when we act justly, we come to know more about reality. And so it is with beauty. Beauty allows us to penetrate reality through the imagination, through the capacity of the imagination to perceive the world intuitively.

Seeing the Form—that is the title of the first volume of von Balthasar’s trilogy. Aesthetics comes from the Greek word for perception, *aisthesis*. Saint Thomas Aquinas defined beauty as “*id quod visum placet*”—that which being seen, pleases. A work of art has a flash of radiance about it that we find pleasurable, but the pleasure comes from our recognition of meaning, a pattern within our normally chaotic experience.

The intuitive perception of meaning that art provides helps us to see that imagination is akin to reason: both seek truth through the apprehension of order and pattern. Art employs beautiful forms to generate objects that penetrate reality.

Beauty tends to elicit in us a type of shock. We draw a breath in. Why? If beauty tells us about the eternal verities, whence the surprise? Ezra Pound once said that the artist’s task is to “make it new.” The “it” is the truth of the world. A work of art doesn’t invent truth, but it does make it accessible to us in ways that are not normally available because words and images have been tarnished by overuse or neglect. Art fails when it merely tells us what we already know in the ways that we already know it.

That is why art is so deeply related to the prophetic dimension and the place where it connects to truth. That prophetic shock, that challenge to complacency, that revelatory reconfiguration of the way things are, gives us a truer picture of the way that the world is.

Truth without beauty is fleshless abstraction, a set of propositions. Only beauty can incarnate truth in concrete, believable, human flesh.

Beauty also has the capacity to help us to value the good, especially the goodness of the most ordinary things. The greatest epics, the most terrible tragedies, all have one goal: to bring us back to the ordinary and help us to love and to cherish it. Odysseus encounters Circe, Cyclops, the sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, but his real destination is home and the marital bed that makes it his place in the world.

That is the magic of art. It may spread a huge canvas, it may be bold and baroque, but its essence is to remind us of the everyday and to transmute it into a sacrament.

Beauty tutors our compassion, making us more prone to love and to see the attraction of goodness. Art takes us out of our self-referentiality and invites us to see through the eyes of the other, whether that other is the artist herself or a character in a story. Because

beauty endows goodness with mercy, it enables us to see how difficult it is to achieve goodness, how often one good exists in tension with another. Our pursuit of the good is inherently dramatic, and drama is based on conflict.

Thus goodness without beauty is moralism, holier than thou.

At the same time, it is only fair to say that beauty without truth is a lie. Beauty without truth becomes the mask that von Balthasar speaks of, a mask that has no relationship to the face behind it.

Beauty without goodness is frigid and lifeless. It can be pure virtuosity—form without meaning—but then it fails to touch the heart. We admire the acrobatics but fail to see the point.

Perhaps it goes without saying, but any serious discussion of beauty needs to treat it as something more than prettiness. The Greeks, as I have suggested, were deeply divided about beauty. They loved harmony, proportion, symmetry, the ideal form. But they also knew darkness, as their tragedies attest.

To my mind, a deeper understanding of beauty came into being with Christianity. The cross, the instrument of torture and shame, was taken up into a higher vision of beauty. Brokenness and woundedness—the shattering of the ideal—can become the means whereby beauty is revealed. Here is a beauty that is anything but sentimental. It is akin to what Yeats meant by his phrase *“a terrible beauty.”* Lest we forget, the glorified body of the risen Christ still bears the marks of his wounds.

Beauty itself wounds us, pierces our hearts, opens us up. Let us, then, free it to dance in *“uncontained splendor around the double constellation of the true and the good.”*⁴

Iris Murdoch says, “Following a hint in Plato (Phaedrus 250) I shall start by speaking of what is perhaps the most obvious thing in our surroundings which is an occasion for ‘unselfing’, and that is what is popularly called beauty.”⁵

Consider the “Burden of Jadedness”⁶

“The personal inability to perceive truth and beauty is related as first cousin, if not sibling, to a lack of wonder, which in turn, often if not always, arises from jadedness, from a perduring and even disgusting boredom caused by excess and overindulgence.

⁴ Wolfe, *ibid.*

⁵ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, (Routledge, 2001), 82.

⁶ Thomas Dubay, *The Evidential Power of Beauty: Science and Theology Meet*, (Ignatius Press, 1999), 72-75.

‘The dimming of [the soul’s] light – is not this the very essence of sin?’ Unremitting and un-repented sin begets satiety, surfeit, and personal burnout – all of which add up to the personal disaster of jadedness, which radically dulls a lively response to the beautiful.”

[*Perduring* = to continue to exist]

[*Satiety* = the overindulgence & disgust caused by excess]

[*Surfeit* = overabundance or immoderate indulgence of something]

“To be listless, dull, bored, and lifeless is not only a miserable condition, it is an illness, a fact obvious to anyone who is intellectually alive. To respond to reality and to appreciate it are normal; not to respond is abnormal. It seems fair to say that a person blind and deaf to beauty, uninterested in anything noble in literature, science, philosophy, religion, and the arts, focused on sense pleasures along (licit or illicit), is not only unattractive to others but most likely incapable of genuine love and delight. This tragic illness seems identical to what a few decades ago the atheistic existentialists of absurdity (e.g., Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus) had in mind when they spoke about existential boredom. This was not simply a particular boredom with a book, a lecture, a cocktail party. It was an insipid tedium with existence itself. Reality was a colossal blah. Dim indeed.”

But what causes this “jadedness”?

“But probably the chief cause of jadedness is satiation, a surfeit born of a hedonistic immersion in sensual gratifications, together with avarice and pride. A lifestyle of selfish egoism and continuing dissipation progressively deadens an excitement with reality born of innocence and solid-virtue, self-denial and genuine love. Saint Paul was on target when he connected permanent joy with God-centeredness. ‘Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice!’ (Phil. 4:4).

The sinner makes ends out of means. This perversion, being a reversal of the dynamics of human realism must dull and eventually kill inner vitality. In his masterpiece, *The Brothers Karamazov*, one of the greatest novels in all of world literature, Fyodor Dostoyevski explored and laid open the depths of the human soul and the question of God. On the lips of one of his characters we find the remark that ‘to live without God is nothing but torture... Man cannot live without kneeling... If he rejects, he kneels before an idol of wood or of gold or an imaginary one... They are all idolaters and not atheists. That’s what they ought to be called.’ When created things, good as they are in themselves, are no longer sought as means but are made into idols, a jaded satiation appears on the horizon. Indeed, sin does obscure sight.”⁷

Consider the puzzling triadic constellations of “three”

Special Revelation of Holy Scripture displays multiple sets triadic constellations

The celestial lights created on Day Four: Sun, Moon & Stars (Gen 1:16)

⁷ Dubay, cited above.

The Fall account of Genesis 3: How many present?

The particularities of The Genesis 3 Temptation: How many temptations?

Three primary sons of Adam

Noah has three sons (Genesis 6)

There are three OT personages known as patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac & Jacob (Genesis 12f)

Abraham, while camped before the oak of Mamre, is approached by three “men” (Genesis 19)

The Ark of the Covenant contained three items: jar of manna, Aaron’s rod & the stone testimony

The Aaronic blessing has a three-fold nature (Numbers 6)

The three offices of Government (Isaiah 33:22)

Triad of Hebrew terms “iniquity, sin & transgressions” (Exodus 34:7; Psalm 32; Psalm 51)

Jonah is in the belly of the fish three days

Jesus cites this as prophetic of His being in the grave three days (Matt 12:40)

The Magi bring three gifts: Gold, Frankincense & Myrrh (Matthew 2)

Three divine Persons present at Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3)

The Tempting of Christ is made up of three temptations (Matthew 4)

Theologically all temptation is made up of three components (1 John 2)

There are three primary Apostles: Peter, James & John

Peter denies Him three times

Jesus reaffirms Peter three times

At His crucifixion there are three crucified together

The Great Trinitarian passage of Matt 28 specifies baptism into the Name (singular) of three (plural) Divine Persons: **Father, Son & Holy Spirit**

The threefold Offices of Jesus Christ, **Prophet, Priest & King** (Hebrews 1:1-3; Isaiah 33:22)

The great Love chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 identifies three things remaining: **Faith, Hope & Love**

1 John 5:7 says, “*For there are **three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood**; and these three agree.*”

The Trinitarian benedictions of the NT: 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2

The four sets of three groupings of Revelation 4:8

*Holy, Holy, Holy
Lord God Almighty
Who was, and is and is to come*

General creation (the cosmos) manifests multiple sets of triadic constellations

There are three primary colors: **Red, Yellow & Blue**... why three?

There are, at the most foundational level, three components of music: **Rhythm, Melody & Harmony**. Why three?

Consider the ancient Trivium of Education: **Grammar, Logic & Rhetoric**

Consider the three dimensional nature of Space: **Length, Breadth & Height**. Why three?

Consider the three dimensional nature of Time: **Past, Present & Future**. Why three?

Consider the three dimensional nature of the Universe itself: **Space, Time & Matter**. Why three?

In her book Jana Levin puzzles over this same thing...

“Before we toy with the extent of space and challenge its mask of infinity, have to wonder first about the dimensionality of space. Maybe the universe isn’t even three-

dimensional but just wears a very convincing guise. So the first property of the large-scale landscape of the cosmos we have to treat is the property of three: why three?... Truth is, I don't know why. If it's any consolation neither does anyone else. Being really honest, we don't even know for sure that three is the magic number. The universe is at least three-dimensional, but maybe there are more dimensions that we can't yet see... First, we can count dimensions constructively, going up the ladder of dimensions from zero to three. A zero-dimensional manifold is just a point and not really a space at all, in the sense that it has no extent whatsoever. Slide the point in one direction, say south to north, to make a one-dimensional line. Slide the line in a new direction, say east and west, as though laden with ink to make a two-dimensional square. Slide the square in the last remaining direction, up and down, to trace out a three-dimensional cube.

It's not impossible that there is a fourth dimension or a fifth, maybe even six extra dimensions or more. Extra dimensions recur in theories beyond Einstein's. Yet we seem to be oblivious of their existence. If they do exist, the burden that theoretical physicists face is to explain why we seem to only move around in three.”⁸

Indeed, we might ask, “Why three?...”

The three-fold makeup of the Mind (or Consciousness)

Cognition, Volition & Affection

Cognition: The Intellect, Knowledge, Understanding

Volition: The Will or Desire

Affection: The Feeling, Mood, Emotions, the source from which creativity is stimulated through the Imagination

With our cognition we affirm & yet deny Truth.

With our volition we both refuse & yet desire Goodness.

With our affection we are mysteriously attracted to Beauty.

Here is the basis of the weekly assignments: Head, Hand & Heart (Truth, Choice & Feelings)

⁸ Jana Levin, *How the Universe Got Its Spots: Diary of a Finite Time in a Finite Space*, (Anchor, 2003), 1114-126.

Observe the statement of 1 Corinthians 8:1 that “*knowledge puffs up*” in connection with identifying the third category “boastful pride of life” with the Transcendental of Truth (knowledge).

Summary:

With our cognition we seek after the Transcendental of Truth. Yet our bent nature results in pursuing Truth to reshape God’s rules & think we know better than Him (Gen 3), and in our ‘posturing’ before others (Matt 3 & 1 John 2).

With our volition we seek after the Transcendental of Goodness. Yet our bent nature results in pursuing the “Good” for us through our fleshly appetites (Gen 3, Matt 3 & 1 John 2).

With our affection we seek after the Transcendental of Beauty. Yet our bent nature results in pursuing Beauty through our ‘visual orientation’ yet without the guiding restraints of categories of Truth & Goodness (Law... or the Way).

Why Philosophy matters?...Because Philosophy impacts us on three levels

[The following paradigmatic approach owes its origin to Ravi Zacharias]

Level One: Academic philosophizing... TRUTH

Level Two: Artistic philosophizing... BEAUTY

Level Three: Conversational philosophizing... GOODNESS

Level One – Academic Philosophizing⁹ (The pursuit of truth thru logic)

The first level is the foundational & theoretical substructure of logic on which inductions are made and deductions postulated. Thus, this level depends heavily upon the laws of logic. Its focus is on Truth.

Ravi lists the four laws of logic as follows:

1. ***The law of identity***: If A then not non-A.
2. ***The law of non-contradiction***: Not both A and non-A.
3. ***The law of rational inference***: If the premises are true and the argument valid, there is a rational deduction.
4. ***The law of the excluded middle***: Just because two things have one thing in common does not mean they have everything in common.

⁹ Ravi Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith we Defend*, (Thomas Nelson, 2010), 319.

The next issue is how to build a brief logical argument. Peter Kreeft, professor of philosophy at Boston College, writes,

“There are three things that must go right with any argument:

1. **The terms must be unambiguous**
2. **The premises must be true**
3. **The argument must be logical”¹⁰**

Level One is where the laws of logic are applied to reality. Contextually, this may take place in the academic setting, in a formal debate, in a textbook or scholarly article. The importance of this cannot be overstated.

Ravi, to illustrate this, cites an exchange he had with a student on the campus of the University of the Philippines.

“A student from the audience shouted out that everything in life was meaningless. I responded by saying, ‘You do not believe that.’ He promptly retorted, ‘Yes, I do,’ to which I automatically countered, ‘No, you don’t.’ Exasperated, he said, ‘I most certainly do; who are you to tell me I don’t?’ ‘Then please repeat your statement for me,’ I requested. ‘Everything in life is meaningless,’ he stated again without qualification. I said to him, ‘Please remain standing; this will only take a moment. I assume that you believe your statement is meaningful. If your statement is meaningful, then everything is not meaningless. On the other hand, if everything is meaningless, then what you have just said is meaningless too. So in effect you have said nothing.’ The young man was startled for a moment and even as I left the auditorium, he was pacing the floor muttering, ‘If everything is meaningless, then...’”¹¹

Level Two – Artistic Philosophizing (The pursuit of beauty in the Imagination)

Level Two takes place in the context of the Arts. It finds its refuge in the imagination, the affections or feeling.

At this level, thoughts in the form of feelings & attitudes & the consequences thereof enter our minds touching our imagination through visual and auditory media. Level two is incredibly effective.

As Scottish Politician Andrew Fletcher said, “*Let me write the songs of a nation – I don’t care who writes its laws.*”

Historically, it is Level Two, through music, drama, literature, that has molded the souls of nations far more than solid reasoning.

¹⁰ Peter Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life*, (Ignatius Press, 1989), 54.

¹¹ Zacharias, 320.

Ponder well its reach into our souls. To use a metaphor from computer technology, Level Two, the realm of the Arts, of aesthetics, of beauty, the imagination... this level, unlike Level One, has no firewall... no virus protection.

“There is a road from the eye to the heart that does not go through the intellect” – G.K. Chesterton

This was the profound insight of Andrew Fletcher... *“Let me write the songs of a nation – I don’t care who writes its laws.”*

Today, in the West, Level Two has molded the soul of this culture into that of existential sensateness...

Level Three – Conversational Philosophizing (The pursuit of the Good)

These are “kitchen-table conclusions”. This level of philosophical discourse fills coffee-houses, sidewalk cafes and dorm rooms.

Observe that Level One concerns logic, Level Two feeling (the imagination) and Level Three applies it all to reality, to life, to the “good”.

Ravi concludes that at Level one states why we believe what we believe, level two indicates why we live the way we live, and level three states why we legislate for others the way we do.

For every life that is lived at a reasonable level, these three questions must be answered.

First, can I defend what I believe in keeping with the laws of logic? That is, *is it tenable?*
Second, if everyone gave himself or herself the prerogatives of my philosophy, could there be harmony in existence? That is, *is it livable?*
Third, do I have a right to make moral judgments in the matters of daily living? That is, *is it transferable?* None of these levels can exist in isolation. They must follow a proper sequence.

Here is the key: One must argue from level one, illustrate from level two, and apply at level three. Life must move from truth to experience to prescription. If either the theist or the atheist violates this procedure, he or she is not dealing with reality but is creating one of his or her own.”

Why philosophy? Because we are commanded to love God with all our mind

Because Regeneration includes Renewal of the Mind which includes a Sanctified Imagination (the realm of Beauty)

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
(Romans 12:1,2)

Two commands are juxtaposed, the first negative & the second positive.

Consider the deepened understanding of the spirit of the Law Jesus gave in Matthew 5...
What new understanding of the Ten Commandments does this give?

And what of the 2nd Command *“Thou shalt make no graven image”*?

Consider the statement of Romans 1:23 that mankind *“exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”*

Observe the flow of thought in Romans one. They exchanged the glory of God for images; but images of what?

Is not pornography this very thing? And is this not a clear description of a reprobate imagination in need of sanctification?

Christians are not to think thoughts like the world. May I inquire, "What pathways of the mind do you habitually walk?"

Because the bankruptcy of postmodern thought has left a philosophical and epistemological vacuum.

Because a Pastor must be a well-educated man

Because of the practical issues philosophy touches on.

- The Four fundamental issues every worldview or religion must answer of Origin, Meaning, Morality & Destiny.
- Problem of Suffering & Evil
- Challenge of Religious Pluralism...
- Problem of Islam

- Culturally correct prime value of 'Tolerance'...

Because Christian lay-people need to be intellectually engaged if we are to impact our culture for Christ.

Craig asserts "Our churches are unfortunately overly-populated with people whose minds, as Christians, are going to waste. As Malik observed, they may be spiritually regenerate, but their minds have not been converted; they still think like nonbelievers. Despite their Christian commitment, they remain largely empty selves. What is an empty self? An empty self is a person who is passive, sensate, busy and hurried, incapable of developing an interior life. Such a person is inordinately individualistic, infantile and narcissistic.

Imagine now a church filled with such people. What will be the theological understanding, the evangelistic courage, the cultural penetration of such a church? If the interior life does not really matter all that much, why should one spend the time trying to develop an intellectual, spiritually mature life? If someone is basically passive, he will just not make the effort to read, preferring instead to be entertained. If a person is sensate in orientation, then music, magazines filled with pictures, and visual media in general will be more important than mere words on a page or abstract thoughts. If one is hurried and distracted, one will have little patience for theoretical knowledge and too short an attention span to stay with an idea while it is being carefully developed. And if someone is overly individualistic, infantile and narcissistic, what will that person read, if he reads at all? Books about Christian celebrities, Christian romance novels imitating the worst that the world has to offer, Christian self-help books filled with slogans, simplistic moralizing, lots of stories and pictures, and inadequate diagnoses of the problems facing the reader. What will not be read are books that equip people to develop a well-reasoned, theological understanding of the Christian faith and to assume their role in the broader work of the kingdom of God. Such a church will become impotent to stand against the powerful forces of secularism that threaten to wash away Christian ideas in a flood of thoughtless pluralism and misguided scientism. Such a church will be tempted to measure her success largely in terms of numbers--numbers achieved by cultural accommodation to empty selves. In this way, the church will become her own grave digger; for her means of short-term "success" will turn out in the long run to be the very thing that buries her.

Despite Christian commitment many remain "largely empty selves."

If a believer is passive – "he will just not make the effort to read, preferring instead to be entertained."

If a believer is sensate – "music, magazines filled with pictures, and visual media" will be more important than propositional truth printed in the medium of words on paper.

If a believer is busy and hurried – "one will have little patience for theoretical knowledge and too short an attention span to stay with an idea while it is being carefully developed."

If a believer is overly individualistic, infantile and narcissistic – If he reads at all it will be "books about Christian celebrities, Christian romance novels imitating the worst that the world has to offer, Christian self-help books filled with slogans, simplistic moralizing, lots of stories and pictures, and inadequate diagnoses of the problems facing the reader."

What WILL NOT BE READ "are books that equip people to develop a well-reasoned, theological understanding of the Christian Faith and to assume their role in the broader work of the kingdom of God."

What is the prognosis? "The church will become her own grave digger."

***Defending the Faith*¹² – The Apologetic Task**

The Task of Apologetics (Chapter One)

"The task or science of Christian apologetics is primarily concerned with providing an intellectual defense of the truth claims of the faith." (p13)

Apologia means "to make a rhetorical or verbal defense"

"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." (1 Peter 3:14-16)

Consider the role of Apologetics in the Early Church

DEFENSIVE POSTURE

OFFENSIVE POSTURE – The role of proof and persuasion

Important summary statement page 19 – "This book, therefore, is both introductory and restrictive. It is not a comprehensive study of apologetics but a primer on the two major propositions we must defend: the existence of God and the authority of the Bible."

Apologetics and Saving Faith

- *Notitia*
- *Assensus*
- *Fiducia*

¹² R.C. Sproul, *Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics* (Crossway, 2009), chapter one.

Apologetics deals with the first two, essentially clearing the brush away, so that the seeker can hear the voice of the Spirit through Scripture.

The Question of Epistemology

The fundamental issue then was and is, “What epistemological base will we begin from?” That is to say, “what will be the beginning point for our source of knowledge about Origins, Meaning in life, Morals and Destiny”?

And here there are fundamentally only two choices: man or God. To find meaning in life, to answer the ultimate questions of Origin, Meaning, Morality & Destiny, one must either begin with the Cosmos, and hence man and man’s thoughts about the cosmos, OR one must begin with the Creator God and His thoughts about the cosmos.

Allow me to simply summarize saying that with regard to questions about life, the world, meaning, morality and origins...the Renaissance built its understanding of life and the world, upon the epistemological source of man.

The Reformation built its understanding of life and the world, upon God and God’s revelation in Holy Scripture. The two beginning points could not be more diametrically opposed.

“The Enlightenment was not only an intellectual phenomenon but also a broadly cultural phenomenon. Eighteenth-century European man lived in the midst of the collapse of tradition and authority. Traditional ways of relating to the earth and of organizing society were rapidly being rejected in favor of ways that were ‘better’ – ways that more effectively secured desired ends. And the authoritative hold of the Christian church on the European populace had been destroyed by the Reformation and the wars of religion. For many in Europe these developments yielded an exhilarating sense of liberation. The shackles of tradition and authority had been thrown off, and man was now free. That theme is sounded powerfully, for example, in Kant’s famous essay ‘What Is Enlightenment?’ But obviously liberation from tradition and authority poses this crucial decision: If we are not to guide our decisions by those, by what then? Will not any alternative merely place us under different shackles? And if guidance by a shared tradition and authority is no longer available, what then can unify society and secure a commonwealth?

The answer that the Enlightenment gave to these anxious questions was Reason. We are to be guided by Reason. Reason is something that each of us possesses intrinsically. It is not something extrinsic to us. Thus, to follow the voice of Reason is not to submit to some new external authority. It is to follow *one’s own* voice. It is to submit to what is of the very essence of oneself. And that, of course, is not really to submit to anything. It is to be free.

Furthermore, Reason belongs to all of us in common. It belongs to the very essence of what it is to be human. To follow the voice of Reason is to follow a voice that all of us hear. Reason offers the genuine possibility of being the foundation for a commonwealth. ‘*Sapere aude!*’ says Kant. ‘Have the courage to use your own intelligence! is . . . the motto of the enlightenment.’

Now the form assumed by the vision of the Enlightenment when it came to matters of religion was what may be called the evidentialist challenge to religious belief. . . . No religion is acceptable unless rational, and no religious is rational unless supported by evidence. That is the evidentialist challenge.”

Wolterstorff continues, “This challenge was clearly issued by John Locke,” who “insisted that to be rational in holding them [beliefs in the claims of Christianity] we needed evidence for them.”

“Many philosophers have endorsed the idea that the strength of one’s belief ought always to be proportional to the strength of the evidence for that belief. Thus, according to John Locke a mark of the rational person is ‘the not entertaining any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant.’ According to David Hume ‘A wise man . . . proportions his belief to the evidence.’ . . .

More recently, Bertrand Russell has endorsed the same idea: ‘Give to any hypothesis which is worth your while to consider,’ he says, ‘just that degree of credence which the evidence warrants’; and in his view the evidence warrants no credence in the existence of God.”¹³

This brings us, then, to the modern view of epistemology.

Where are we today?¹⁴

“Worldviews are the grids; they are the lenses through which we frame all of reality; the paradigm from which everything actually emerges. And what happens 9 times out of 10, the particulars of a story are extrapolated to a metanarrative and becomes the bigger picture of all of life itself for these individuals. So, they are really worldviews in the making, in their youth and in their younger days, and in their cultures.

I want to talk to you a little today about how one deals with issues such as these. How did we get to where we are in America today? I think the biggest danger America lives with is the failure to recognize that if the worldview that framed her is abandoned, the worldview that she thinks she is espousing will not be strong enough to withstand the assaults of counter perspectives.

¹³ Alvin Plantinga & Nicholas Wolterstorff, editors, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, (University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, Indiana, 1991), 5-14.

¹⁴ Ravi Zacharias, from an audio entitled “*Apologetics & Worldviews*”; rzim.org

Europe and other vast sub-continents that have gone the way of ravage secularism are flirting with extinction. It is happening before our eyes. Islam will not allow a totally secularized society. And if you look at the growth rate alone, and the birth rate of 1:8 for the non-Muslim world to the Muslim world. You can begin to see that the numbers alone are stacked against the Naturalistic framework. There is not going to be even the shadow of a chance by the time 2020 and 2030 come around, Europe and how it has known itself will be a thing of the past.

And the Muslim scholars ask, 'Why are we blowing up bombs? Why are we killing people? One or two generations and it'll be ours anyway.'

When a worldview is framed, the first impact, of course, is culture. Culture is an effort to find a coherent set of answers to the existential questions that confront all of us in the passages of our lives.

So the culture in which you are born, frames a series of answers to the existential questions that confront you in the passages of your life...

First, a brief look at the past of what brought us to this point.

If you go back to the 14th, 15th & 16th centuries, you'll see the **Renaissance**, and man became the measure of all things. Man was to be the referencing point in a self-referencing authoritarian stance.

That was shown in the Arts, in Literature... you began to see that there was this puffed chest sense that we will get there pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps.

What happened in the 19th century, with the Romantic Poets, they used terms like, "*Man is born again.*" They were using terms with **self-referencing authority**. So the Renaissance brought about the measurement level of the measure being within man himself.

It then moved from there to **Rationalism**. From man being the measure, you moved to the time of Rene Descartes, the 16th & early 17th centuries, *cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am. What Descartes really should have strictly said was, *I think, therefore thinking exists*.

It went to the Rationalistic interpretation of the world with a capital R. And the only thing you could be certain of was that you existed, because in order to deny your existence, you had to actually exist to deny it. And thinking existed. Therefore you existed. And mathematics became the only certain science.

So you move from man becoming the measure, in the Arts and Literature to the idea of Mathematical Certainty and man became a Thinking Being. From man being a **self-referencing being**, man became a **thinking being**.

You move from there over into the seventeen & eighteen hundreds and people like David Hume and others who went into the empirical mode, made man an **Empirical Being**.

The only thing you could be certain of was what happened in the laboratory. Man became the measure. Rationalism came and only mathematics became the most certain discipline. David Hume comes along and says, 'the only thing you can be certain of... here's the statement he takes...

"If we take in our hands any volume of divinity or school of metaphysics for instance, let us ask, 'Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?' No. 'Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?' No. Commit it then to the flames for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."

Hume's suggestion that meaningful statements are either mathematical or scientific raises the question right from the beginning, because his definition itself is neither mathematical or scientific.

It is a metaphysical pronouncement about these certainties. So you move from man being the measure to the rational certainty that man sought only in the field of mathematics to the ideas of the science lab and empirical certainty, and Naturalism was sort of waiting to be born. It was not at all surprising that the metaphysicians like Immanuel Kant who were influenced by David Hume, ultimately became skeptics on metaphysical matters.

Skepticism: You cannot be certain about any metaphysical pronouncement. That started off with things like ethics and morality and so on, till ultimately God was evicted Himself, and on the heels of people like David Hume, coming to us in the eighteenth century and nineteenth century, the High Critical theories were being born by the time the twentieth century came and liberal theologians were reigning supreme in the seminaries. God's word was no longer treated with any authority, because to even talk about God, you cannot be certain in any sense whatsoever.

So man became a skeptical being. It is interesting that you move from **Rationalism** all the way to **Empiricism** to **Skepticism**. **Existentialism** was waiting to be born. The passions, the will, the feeling, the emotions was sort of watching from the stands, this game being played out for who was going to provide the centerpiece for truth and certainty.

Existentialism: Existence precedes essence – what you do precedes what you are.

Christianity: Essence precedes existence – what you are precedes what you do.

Are they going to allow mathematics to dominate the field? Are they going to allow the sciences to dominate the field? So people like Sartre and Camus came on the scene. They were absolutely brilliant. They did not philosophize systematically. They philosophized by telling stories.

And people latched onto the story; identified with the story. Whether you are reading Camus's *The Stranger* or you are reading Sartre's *No Exit*, you begin to see yourself in that story. And there is a severance that takes place between what you think out there and what you feel down here.

Who is going to engage them? With what degree of certainty can you come when God is being assaulted from the **metaphysical side** as '*a meaningless statement*', from the **empirical side** as '*not measureable in any setting*', from the **rational certainty side**, '*it does not fit into mathematics*' but **existentially** we are driven and driven, story after story after story. And so they basically say, 'that's what you want, its good enough for you, but don't try to tell us it actually stands the test of reason.'

You and I are immediate suspects in any discussion if we even hint at the fact that the category of evangelical or Christian can be put beside us taking the word of God at face value.

So man moved from a measurement being [Renaissance] to a rational being [Descartes], to an empirical being [Hume], to a skeptical being [Kant] all the way down to existentialism to a volitional being [Sarte & Camus]. Now what happened?

We moved from all of this to post-modernism. And the post-modern mind was basically '*man became the author of all being*'.

It is not the author who tells you what he has written. It is the reader who tells you what he wants the author to say to you.

Post-modernism has shifted the weight from objective statements and facts to the reader who sits in authority over it and determines whether this is meaningful or not.

Now here is where I want to take you through a bridge, which is very critical. Because this, I think, is important for us to understand.

The bifurcation of how this world is thinking has separated the East from the West. In the West, Christianity has been marginalized and even ridiculed. In the East, Western religion is criticized while Eastern religion is still protected.

If you go to Singapore or the Oriental countries now you'll see a resurgence of Confucius and the old writers and the sages. They are treating their own writers of old with a great deal of respect and reverence. So in the West, Christianity is marginalized, even ridiculed, while in the East Western religion is criticized while Eastern religion is well protected.

In the West Christianity has been evicted from the Academy. In the East there is a resurgence of pride in ancient wisdom. In the West theology has been replaced by religion. In the East religion was always seen as a process and a pursuit. So in the West

theology has been replaced by religion, and in the East religion has always been seen as a process and a pursuit.

In the West, Truth displaced, had nothing to replace it. In the East, displacement of Truth was not felt because culture was the driving force.

Have you ever tried to debate the Koran with a Muslim? You are wasting your time. He will look at you and say, "The Koran says it. I believe it. That's it." I talked to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and he said, "Why are you wasting your time with me? The Koran has said it. I believe it. That settles it."

So the "truth" to Muslims is inscripted in that one volume. The Truth to India is enshrined across centuries of culture. You come to the West, and it is fascinating to pick up book after book after book...(attacking Christianity)

I raised a question in my book, for example, "Isn't it interesting that in the West when a person wants to fill in the blanks with profanity or nothing left to say the name of Jesus Christ is so casually used. You never hear that of Buddha or Mohammed or Krishna or anybody in the East.

The very centerpiece of what made this culture possible is a profane and a swear word. And the more I was reading Robert Price, chapter after chapter, I didn't know whether to cry or whether to pray or to say, "God, where does one even go with this full blooded hit?"

One of the questions I raised of Price in an interview, "Isn't it interesting... he would dare not go in Saudi Arabia and decry Islam. He would dare not go into India and decry Hinduism. He would dare not go into Thailand and decry Buddhism. He would dare not go into an Academy and assault Naturalism.

The only worldview that is open to this kind of an assault and can take it in the chin is the Judeo-Christian worldview, which alone ought to speak for the nobility of this Faith that allows you the privilege of taking it head-on and still loving the person that is attacking.

Now, is this all bad news? I don't believe so. Until we are put into the fire of testing we will never be able to prove whether this faith is just a cultural belief of our own or whether it is something that drives the deepest conviction of our heart.

I think that when you look at China today. It's incredible to realize that today they are talking of nearly 100 million believers in China! I have a copy of the newspaper article from the Shanghai Post, in 1966 I think it was, when Mao Tse Tung said, 'Christianity has been permanently buried. It will never rise again. It has been expunged from our culture. It will never show its face again.' And yet in China today 100 million people claim to follow Christ.

The reality is that we need to take a step back and ask ourselves a question, “Is this love that I have for Jesus Christ something that I have actually experienced as well? Or is it so cerebrally driven that every time another person departs from the faith there is a little twinge in your heart saying, “I wonder if that person is right?”

I have met so many young people who quote these people and say, “Is there something to this?” I urge you to Google the name of Ian Wilson and see his interview with the British Press and with the Wall Street Journal. Ian Wilson a few years ago was the biggest name basically trashing Christianity. A brilliant writer and big name in the United Kingdom. Trashing Christianity. He wrote about C.S. Lewis and mocked him and wrote how he had been beaten in a debate here and there and nothing more than childish stuff.

This Easter, Ian Wilson comes back to the Lord. And when you see his interview it is brilliant. He said he succumbed to the pressure of the media and his colleagues, between the Academy and the entertainers who would mock things spiritual. And he bought into their line. And the more he rubbed shoulders with them, the more he would see what would go on behind closed doors. That it was nothing more than a lot of ideologically driven with a bent to destroy all of this. And the more he came into contact with true Christians, the more he saw who the real saints were and who really had the answers to life.

The British journalist Matthew Parris...log on and see his article. He says he is confounded as an atheist having gone to Africa and come back and absolutely convinced, he says, “I do not know how to explain this as an atheist...what Africa needs more than anything else is the Gospel and the missionary.”

And then he says, “Now some of you may turn around and make this comment, ‘why can’t other NGOs also go and reach out?’” He said, “No. It doesn’t seem to work the same way. It’s a package deal with redemption.”

These are people who have stood on both sides of it, straddled the lines, and they know where the real answers are.

This statement by Calvin Miller...

“The sermon and the Spirit will always work in combination to produce liberation. Sometimes the Spirit and the sermon do supply direct answers to human need. But most often they answer indirectly. Most problems are not solved by listening to sermons. The sermon no matter how sincere cannot solve these unsolvable problems. So the sermon is not a problem solver. Where shall we go for solutions? Together with the Spirit the sermon exists to point out that having answers is not essential always to living. What is essential is the sense of God’s presence during dark seasons of questioning. Our need for specific answers is dissolved in the greater issue of the Lordship of Jesus over all of our questions, those that have answers and those that don’t.”

Now, for you as an apologist, hear is what I want you to understand. Follow me very carefully.

There is a difference between a worldview that is not able all questions to fullest satisfaction and a worldview that that is systemically contradictory. Do you understand what I am saying? Hinduism, Islam, Naturalism are systemically contradictory.

I have a Hindu friend who came to know Christ in my living room and we talked for one year Sunday after Sunday, until I was getting fed up with this. My wife said, “Why are you wasting your time?” I said, “He’s an Indian. We’re used to going around in circles. Give him a little more time.”

Once I said to him, “Why do you take up so much of my time?” And his answer was, “You created this monster. You now feed it.” And I said, “If every birth is a rebirth, and every life is paying for a previous life, what were you paying for in your first life?”

This fellow said to me, “You know, if I borrow money from a bank, they are at least kind enough to tell me how much I owe, and how long I have to pay it back in. Karma is the most cruel thing, where you never know how much you owe or how long it’s going to take to pay it back.”

A Historical Overview of Western Philosophy – First “LOOK” **[handout...#1]**

MODERNISM (1600 – 1900)

Modernism began with the assumption that there was an objective world which could be studied and utilized for man’s advancement.

The English poet, Alexander Pope (1688-1744), in his poem, “Essay on Man”, wrote “Know then thyself – presume not God to scan. The proper study of mankind is man.”

H.J. Blackham, a leading British humanist, born 1903 wrote saying, “Humanism is the abandonment of theological preoccupations for a concentration on the finite – and the exploration of it in all directions... There is no immemorial tradition, no revelation, no authority which is beyond question and which can be used as a standard by which to interpret experience. There is only human experience...” (Objections to Humanism, H.J. Blackham)

Modernism, as a way of understanding the universe and all of life, embraced a supreme confidence in human reason.

The Secular Humanist Declaration states, “The problems that humankind will face in the future, as in the past, will no doubt be complex and difficult. However, if it is to prevail, it can only do so by enlisting resourcefulness and courage. Secular humanism places trust in human intelligence rather than divine guidance. Skeptical of theories of

redemption, damnation, and reincarnation, secular humanists attempt to approach the human situation in realistic terms: human beings are responsible for their own destinies. The ethical life can be lived without the illusions of immortality or reincarnation. Human beings can develop the self-confidence necessary to ameliorate the human condition and to lead meaningful, productive lives.”

Modernism was very optimistic about human nature and about the future.

Julian Huxley asserted, “Man’s reason will conquer the universe.”

Robert Hall writing in the Council for Secular Humanism’s periodical *Free Inquiry*, says, “Science, as such, does not acknowledge the supernatural and requires free inquiry into natural history and human existence. Scientific inquiry is a liberation from religious dogmatism, blind faith, vacuous myths, and human emotions. In fact, all scientific explanations, as such, are naturalistic.”¹⁵

Therefore, Modernisms epistemological base, that to which they turned for real knowledge, was man himself.

POST-MODERNISM (1960 to present)

Post-Modernism, as the name suggests, is the aftermath, the consequence of Modernism’s foundation of man and man alone.

Modernism is often pictured as pursuing truth, absolutism, linear thinking, rationalism, certainty, the cerebral as opposed to the affective which, in turn, breeds arrogance, inflexibility, a lust to be right, the desire to control.

Postmodernism, by contrast, recognizes how much of what we “know” is shaped by the culture in which we live, is controlled by emotions, aesthetics and heritage, and can only be intelligently held as part of a common tradition, without overbearing claims to being true or right.

Modernism tries to find unquestioned foundations on which to build the edifice of knowledge and then proceeds with methodological rigor.

Postmodernism denies that such foundations exist, since it is “anti-foundational” and insists that we come to “know” things in many ways, not a few of them lacking in air-tight logical rigor.

¹⁵ Website for the Council is:

<http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php/articles/category/freeinquiry> or
<http://infidels.org/library/modern/nontheism/secularhumanism/>

Course Pack
Philosophy of Religion

Modernism is hard-edged and, in the domain of religion, focuses on truth versus error, right belief, confessionalism.

Postmodernism is gentle and, in the domain of religion, focuses upon relationships, love, shared tradition, integrity in discussion.

Key aspects of Modernism include: Intellectual, Reason, Optimism, Hope for the Future, Objectivism, Exclusivism, Scientific Method, the Evolution of man.

Key aspects of Post-Modernism include: Anti-Intellectual, Feeling, Pessimism, Existential Despair, Subjectivism, Relativism, Pluralism, Inclusivism, distrust in Science, Devolution of man.

Using Baseball as an analogical picture:

Pre-Modernism said, “There’s balls & there’s strikes & I call them as they are.”

Modernism said, “There’s balls & there’s strikes & I call them as I see them.”

Post-Modernism says, “There ain’t nothing until I call them.”

“In Post-Modernism, there is no objective, universal truth; there is only the perspective of the group...in post-modernism, all viewpoints, all lifestyles, all beliefs and behaviors, are regarded as equally valid, tolerance has become so important, that no exception is tolerated.”¹⁶

Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary summarizes Post-Modernism in the following blog...

Ministry is Stranger Than it Used to Be: The Challenge of Postmodernism

A common concern now seems to emerge wherever ministers gather—ministry is stranger than it used to be. Not that ministry is more difficult, more tiring, or more demanding . . . just different—and increasingly strange.

That sense of strangeness may well be due to the rise of postmodern culture and philosophy; perhaps the most important intellectual and cultural movement of the late twentieth century. What difference does postmodernism make? Just look at the modern media, pop culture, and the blank stares you receive from some persons when you talk about truth, meaning, and morality.

Postmodernism developed among academics and artists, but has quickly spread throughout the culture. At the most basic level, postmodernism refers to the passing of modernity and the rise of a new cultural movement. Modernity—the dominant worldview

¹⁶ Charles Colson, *How Now Shall We Live*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), 23.

since the Enlightenment—has been supplanted by postmodernism, which both extends and denies certain principles and symbols central to the modern age.

Clearly, much of the literature about postmodernism is nonsensical and hard to take seriously. When major postmodern figures speak or write, the gibberish which often results sounds more like a vocabulary test than a sustained argument. But postmodernism cannot be dismissed as unimportant or irrelevant. This is not a matter of concern only among academics and the avant garde—this new movement represents a critical challenge to the Christian church, and to the minister.

Actually, postmodernism may not be a movement or methodology at all. We might best describe postmodernism as a mood which sets itself apart from the certainties of the modern age. This mood is the heart of the postmodern challenge.

What are the contours of this postmodern mood? Is this new movement helpful in our proclamation of the Gospel? Or, will the postmodern age bring a great retreat from Christian truth? A look at the basic features of postmodernism may be helpful.

The Deconstruction of Truth

Though the nature of truth has been debated throughout the centuries, postmodernism has turned this debate on its head. While most arguments throughout history have focused on rival claims to truth, postmodernism rejects the very notion of truth as fixed, universal, objective, or absolute.

The Christian tradition understands truth as established by God and revealed through the self-revelation of God in Scripture. Truth is eternal, fixed, and universal. Our responsibility is to order our minds in accordance with God's revealed truth and to bear witness to this truth. We serve a Savior who identified himself as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" and called for belief.

Modern science, itself a product of the Enlightenment, rejected revelation as a source of truth and put the scientific method in its place. Modernity attempted to establish truth on the basis of scientific precision through the process of inductive thought and investigation. The other disciplines attempted to follow the lead of the scientists in establishing objective truth through rational thought. Modernists were confident that their approach would yield objective and universal truths by means of human reason.

The postmodernists reject both the Christian and modernist approaches to the question of truth. According to postmodern theory, truth is not universal, is not objective or absolute, and cannot be determined by a commonly accepted method. Instead, postmodernists argue that truth is socially constructed, plural, and inaccessible to universal reason.

As postmodern philosopher Richard Rorty asserts, truth is made rather than found. According to the deconstructionists, one influential sect among the postmodernists, all truth is socially constructed. That is, social groups construct their own "truth" in order to serve their own interests. As Michel Foucault—one of the most significant postmodern

theorists—argued, all claims to truth are constructed to serve those in power. Thus, the role of the intellectual is to deconstruct truth claims in order to liberate the society.

What has been understood and affirmed as truth, argue the postmodernists, is nothing more than a convenient structure of thought intended to oppress the powerless. Truth is not universal, for every culture establishes its own truth. Truth is not objectively real, for all truth is merely constructed—as Rorty stated, truth is made, not found.

Little imagination is needed to see that this radical relativism is a direct challenge to the Christian gospel. Our claim is not to preach one truth among many; about one Savior among many; through one gospel, among many. We do not believe that the Christian gospel is a socially constructed truth, but the Truth which sets sinners free from sin—and is objectively, universally, historically true. As the late Francis Schaeffer instructed, the Christian church must contend for true truth.

The Death of the Metanarrative

Since postmodernists believe all truth to be socially constructed, all presentations of absolute, universal, established truth must be resisted. All grand and expansive accounts of truth, meaning, and existence are cast aside as “metanarratives” which claim far more than they can deliver.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, perhaps the most famous European postmodernist, defined postmodernism in this way: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives.”(1) Thus, all the great philosophical systems are dead, all cultural accounts are limited, all that remains are little stories accepted as true by different groups and cultures. Claims to universal truth—the metanarratives—are oppressive, “totalizing” and thus must be resisted.

The problem with this, of course, is that Christianity is meaningless apart from the gospel—which is a metanarrative. Indeed, the Christian gospel is nothing less than the Metanarrative of all Metanarratives. For Christianity to surrender the claim that the gospel is universally true and objectively established is to surrender the center of our faith. Christianity is the great metanarrative of redemption. Our story begins with creation by the sovereign, omnipotent God; continues through the fall of the humanity into sin and the redemption of sinners through the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross; and promises an eternal dual destiny for all humanity—the redeemed with God forever in glory and the unredeemed in eternal punishment. That is the message we preach—and it is a glorious, world-changing metanarrative.

We do not preach the gospel as one narrative among many true narratives, or as “our” narrative alongside the authentic narratives of others. We cannot retreat to claim that biblical truth is merely true for us. Our claim is that the Bible is the Word of God for all. This is deeply offensive to the postmodern worldview, which charges all who claim universal truth with imperialism and oppression.

The Demise of the Text

If the metanarrative is dead, then the great texts behind the metanarratives must also be dead. Postmodernism asserts the fallacy of ascribing meaning to a text, or even to the author. The reader establishes the meaning, and no controls limit the meaning of the reading.

Jacques Derrida, the leading literary deconstructionist, described this move in terms of the “death of the author” and the “death of the text.” Meaning—made, not found—is created by the reader in the act of reading. The text must be deconstructed in order to get rid of the author and let the text live as a liberating word.

This new hermeneutical method explains much of the current debate in literature, politics, law, and theology.

All texts—whether the Holy Scripture, the United States Constitution, or the works of Mark Twain—are subjected to esoteric criticism and dissection, all in the name of liberation.

Texts, according to the postmodernists, reveal a subtext of oppressive intentions on the part of the author, and so must be deconstructed. This is no matter of mere academic significance. This is the argument behind much contemporary constitutional interpretation made by judges, the presentation of issues in the media, and the fragmentation of modern biblical scholarship. The rise of feminist, liberation, homosexual, and various other interest-group schools of interpretation is central to this postmodern principle.

Therefore, the Bible is subjected to radical re-interpretation, often with little or no regard for the plain meaning of the text or the clear intention of the human author. Texts which are not pleasing to the postmodern mind are rejected as oppressive, patriarchal, heterosexist, homophobic, or deformed by some other political or ideological bias. The authority of the text is denied in the name of liberation, and the most fanciful and ridiculous interpretations are celebrated as “affirming” and thus “authentic.”

Of course, the notion of the “death of the author” takes on an entirely new meaning when applied to Scripture, for we claim that the Bible is not the mere words of men, but the Word of God. Postmodernism’s insistence on the death of the author is inherently atheistic and anti-supernaturalistic. The claim to divine revelation is written off as only one more projection of oppressive power.

The Dominion of Therapy

When truth is denied, therapy remains. The critical questions shifts from “What is true?” to “What makes me feel good?.” This cultural trend has been developing throughout the century, but now reaches epic proportions.

The culture we confront is almost completely under submission to what Philip Reiff called the “triumph of the therapeutic.” In a postmodern world, all issues eventually revolve around the self. Thus, enhanced self-esteem is all that remains as the goal of many educational and theological approaches. Categories such as “sin” are rejected as oppressive and harmful to self-esteem.

Therapeutic approaches are dominant in a postmodern culture made up of individuals uncertain that truth even exists—but assured that our self-esteem must remain intact. Right and wrong are discarded as out-of-date reminders of an oppressive past. In the name of our own “authenticity” we will reject all inconvenient moral standards and replace concern for right and wrong with the assertion of our rights.

Theology is likewise reduced to therapy. Entire theological systems and approaches are constructed with the goal reduced to nothing more than self-esteem for individuals and special groups. These “feel good” theologies dispense with the “negativity” of offensive biblical texts, or with the Bible altogether. Out are categories such as “lostness” and judgment. In their place are vague notions of acceptance without repentance and wholeness without redemption. We may not know (or care) if we are saved or lost, but we certainly do feel better about ourselves.

The Decline of Authority

Since postmodern culture is committed to a radical vision of liberation, all authorities must be overthrown. Among the dethroned authorities are texts, authors, traditions, metanarratives, the Bible, God, and all powers on heaven and earth. Except, of course, for the authority of the postmodern theorists and cultural figures, who wield their power in the name of oppressed peoples everywhere.

According to the postmodernists, those in authority use their power to remain in power, and to serve their own interests. Their laws, traditions, texts, and “truth” are nothing more than that which is designed to maintain them in power.

So, the authority of governmental leaders is eroded, as is the authority of teachers, community leaders, parents, and ministers. Ultimately, the authority of God is rejected as totalitarian and autocratic. Ministers are representatives of this autocratic deity, and are to be resisted as authorities as well.

Doctrines, traditions, creeds and confessions—all are to be rejected and charged with limiting self-expression and representing oppressive authority. Preachers are tolerated so long as they stick to therapeutic messages of enhanced self-esteem, and resisted whenever they inject divine authority or universal claims to truth in their sermons.

The Displacement of Morality

Ivan, in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov* was right—if God is dead everything is permissible. The God allowed by postmodernism is not the God of the

Bible, but a vague idea of spirituality. There are no tablets of stone, no Ten Commandments . . . no rules.

Morality is, along with other foundations of culture, discarded as oppressive and totalitarian. A pervasive moral relativism marks postmodern culture. This is not to say that postmodernists are reluctant to employ moral language. To the contrary, postmodern culture is filled with moral discourse. But the issues of moral concern are quite arbitrary, and in many cases represent a reversal of biblical morality.

Homosexuality, for example, is openly advocated and accepted. The rise of gay and lesbian studies in universities, the emergence of homosexual political power, and the homoerotic images now common to popular culture mark this dramatic moral reversal. Homosexuality is no longer considered a sin. Homophobia is now targeted as sin, and demands for tolerance of “alternative lifestyles” have now turned into demand for public celebration of all lifestyles as morally equal.

Michael Jones described modernity as “rationalized sexual misbehavior,” and postmodernity is its logical extension. Michel Foucault, who argued that all sexual morality is an abuse of power, called for postmodernism to celebrate “polymorphous perversity.” He lived and died dedicated to this lifestyle, and his prophecy has been fulfilled in this decade.

Christian Ministry in a Postmodern Age

Postmodernism represents the unique challenge facing Christianity in this generation. Walter Truett Anderson described the postmodern reality in his clever book, *Reality Isn't What it Used to Be*(2) This is the central claim of postmodernism—reality is not what it used to be, and never will be again. Humanity now come of age, we will make our own truth, define our own reality, and seek our own self-esteem.

In this culture, ministry is stranger than it used to be. Postmodern concepts of truth now reign in the postmodern age—and even in the postmodern pew. Research indicates that a growing majority of those who claim to be Christian reject the very notion of absolute truth.

The “death of the text” is evident in the resistance to biblical preaching in many churches. Postmodern ears no longer want to hear the “thus saith the Lord” of the biblical text. Since truth is made, and not found, we can design our own personal religion or spirituality—and leave out inconvenient doctrines and moral commands. Postmodernism promises that the individual can construct a personal structure of spirituality, free from outside interference or permission. Under the motto, “There’s no truth like my truth,” postmodernism’s children will establish their own doctrinal system, and will defy correction.

Gene Veith, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Concordia University, tells of a young man who claimed to be a Christian and professed belief in Christ and love for the

Bible, but also believed in reincarnation. His pastor confronted this belief in reincarnation by directing the young man to Hebrews 9:27. The text was read: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." The young man looked back at his pastor and replied, "Well, that's your interpretation." (3)

In the name of postmodernism, anything can be explained away as a matter of interpretation. Games played with language mean that every statement must be evaluated with care. A statement as clear and plain as the first line of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," must be evaluated in terms of the speaker's intentions. Does this confession assert belief that God is actually the maker of heaven and earth, or is this a statement of mere personal sentiment?

The strangeness of ministry in a postmodern age can be seen in Bible studies which do not study the Bible, but are psychological exercises in self-discovery; in the cafeteria-style morality practiced by so many church members; and in the growing acceptance of other religions as valid paths to salvation.

Modern culture is revolt against the truth, and postmodernism is but the latest form of this revolt. Ministry in these strange times calls for undiluted conviction and faithful apologetics. The temptations to compromise are great, and the opposition which comes to anyone who would claim to preach absolute and eternal truth is severe. But this is the task of the believing church.

We must understand postmodernism, read its theorists and learn its language. This is much a missiological challenge as an intellectual exercise. We cannot address ourselves to a postmodern culture unless we understand its mind.

By its very nature, postmodernism is doomed to self-destruction. Its central principles cannot be consistently applied. (Just ask a postmodern academic to accept the "death of the text" in terms of his contract.) The church must continue to be the people of truth, holding fast to the claims of Christ, and contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Postmodernism rejects any "once for all" truth, but the church cannot compromise its witness.

The Christian ministry is stranger than it used to be. But this is an era of great evangelistic opportunity, for as the false gods of postmodernism die, the church bears witness to the Word of Life. In the midst of a postmodern age, our task is to bear witness to the Truth, and to pick up the pieces as the culture breaks apart.¹⁷

Endnotes:

Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, "Theory and History of Literature," vol. 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. xxiv.

¹⁷ Albert Mohler, blog titled "*Ministry is Stranger than it used to be: The Challenge of Postmodernism*", July 16, 2009, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/07/16/ministry-is-stranger-than-it-used-to-be-the-challenge-of-postmodernism-2/>

Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What it Used to Be* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990).
Gene Veith, "Catechesis, Preaching, and Vocation," in *Here We Stand*, ed. James Boice and Ben Sasse (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), pp. 82-83.

Dr. Jerram Barrs, Resident Scholar at Covenant Theological Seminary, here in St. Louis, writes an analysis of Post-Modern thought saying...

"There is nothing transcendent (neither God nor anything else) that understands everything – so there is no objective truth available to us. It is pointless to even ask the question whether there is an objective world, for we have no way of knowing the answer to such a question. All we have available to us is the language we use to describe what our senses perceive."

Post-Modernism's fragmentation & meaninglessness

"The word 'fragmentation' is often used to characterize the apparent disorder that marks modern culture, whose complexity is in so many ways not enriching, but a scene of sterile self-assertion, self-expression and conflict. At the heart of the disorder is a fragmentation of experience, so that our worlds of thought, action and expression appear to exist independently of, or in conflict with one another. The causes of the development are many, but the intellectual shape of the fragmentation can be expressed quite simply. The three great transcendental of traditional philosophical enquiry – truth, goodness and beauty – are no longer seen to be all truly universal features of our world existing in harmonious interrelationship. The outcome is that truth – if objective truth is believed to exist at all – is widely thought to be the province solely of the scientist, whose work accordingly appears either to be unrelated to the deeper meaning of things or, worse, to impose a view of an empty and meaningless universe.

It is part of the paradox of the modern age that science's discoveries of the sheer beauty, unity and rationality of the universe co-exist with assertions of its essential meaninglessness or indifference to moral values. In face of such a world, human morality appears simply an exercise in self-assertion, in tilting against windmills of unmeaning. Similarly it may be believed that the indifference of the universe to human value entails that there is no true beauty to be discerned and expressed by the artist, whose task becomes accordingly the expression of subjective 'creativity' or experience, and who thus effects the compounding rather than the healing of fragmentation...

The heart of modern fragmentation derives in the final analysis from the attempt to locate the unity of the cosmos in human thought or agency. Cultural fragmentation is in the last analysis to be diagnosed theologically, for it is only through the concept of a reality giving unity – albeit a unity in diversity – to the world that the interrelatedness of things can be maintained. The Christian theological contribution to a healing of our sickness

will derive...from a renewal first of Christology, where we witness God's involvement with and redemption of the material world; and second of Trinitarian theology, where we may find the heart of our social being. It is as the one who became incarnate that the eternal Son enables us to encompass at once the sovereignty of God over the world and the goodness of the human culture which takes place on the soil of the material creation."¹⁸

A Historical Overview of Western Philosophy – Second “LOOK” [Handout...#2]

The Question of Truth (as a metaphysical category)

Then Pilate said to him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.' Pilate said to him, 'What is truth?'. (John 18:37-38)

Intent precedes Content!

The inclination of the heart predetermines both the reception of and interpretation of truth. – Ravi

Hence the Word of God admonishes us to “*Keep Thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.*” (Proverbs 4:23; KJV)

Frequent are the admonishments throughout Proverbs to “*incline your ear to my sayings*”, (Proverbs 4:20), and “*incline your ear to my understanding*”, (Proverbs 5:1).

Toward what is your heart inclined? Toward what are you training it to be inclined?
What appetite have you trained your heart and mind for?

The ancient view: External Correspondence & Internal Cohesion

Historically, up until Post-Modernism, nearly everyone held that “**a statement is true if and only if it corresponds to or agrees with factual reality.**”

This has thus been known & still is today known as ‘*The Correspondence Theory of Truth*’

But broader still, the ancient & time honored assumption about truth has been that truth will correspondence with reality & will therefore have cohesion.

¹⁸ Colin Gunton writing the “Forward” for Jeremy Begbie’s, *Voicing Creation’s Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts*, (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2000), xi-xiii.

Take any statement, any particular understanding or interpretation of a thing and come to what you believe is the truth about it. Square it up with reality. Now take many more particular statements or particulars of understanding and when they are placed alongside one another, if they match reality, if they are true there will be cohesion among them.

This is how every proper application of Law in a courtroom works. This is how all forensic investigation works. This is how all detective investigations work.

First, you must establish the truthfulness of the particulars before you. That is you must reveal how each particular corresponds to reality. Then you compare the whole and ask 'is there cohesion'? Or does it not add up?

Observe:

External Correspondence is the question of "particulars" (Aristotle's), and Internal Cohesion is the question of "universals" (Plato's).

It's the classic distinction between the forest & the tree. *"He can't see the forest for the tree."*

So, once again we have this Ancient Philosophical Question emerge...

So there are two tests of truth: **External Correspondence & Internal Cohesion**

But with the rise of Humanistic thought, in our day, through the contemporary manifestation of Post-Modernism, two rival views of truth, two rival epistemological views have virtually eclipsed the traditional and Biblical **Correspondence view of truth**. These two alternative views are Relativism and Pragmatism.

Epistemological Relativism

The central claim of relativism with regard to its view of truth is that "the truth of a statement depends on the views of persons or cultures, not on whether those views correspond to objective reality."

Observe first that here is a frontal attack on the first of the three Transcendentals: Truth.

This is a direct denial of the concept of absolute transcendent rooted in ultimate reality Truth.

*"It may be true for you but it's not true for me."
"We can't judge other cultures or religions."*

While these views seem to advance both civility and tolerance, they do so at the expense of logic; i.e. rationality.

For when truth is deemed dependent upon the person or culture holding the belief anything can become true, which is absurd!

The problem with relativism is that it removes any reason besides sheer whimsy for changing one's beliefs.

Bottom Line: If my belief is not based on reason, then there is no objective evidence that could alter my belief. I am un-teachable and un-reachable.

Furthermore, if rigidly applied in all fields, Post-Modernism's epistemological relativism will bring the entire infrastructure crashing down of Jurisprudence, Medicine and any other empirically based Science.

Indeed, here is the historical evidence that the empirical sciences did not grow up in the relativism of Eastern Culture. Consider the words of Francis Schaeffer:

"Living within the concept that the world was created by a reasonable God, scientists could move with confidence, expecting to find out about the world by observation and experimentation. This was their epistemological base – the philosophical foundation with which they were sure they could know.... Since the world had been created by a reasonable God, they were not surprised to find a correlation between themselves as observers and the thing observed.... Without this foundation, Western modern science would not have been born."¹⁹

"Without claiming any intellectual superiority for the scientists of the Renaissance and Baroque periods over their ancient and medieval European predecessors or over Oriental philosophers, one has to recognize as a simple fact that 'classical modern science' arose only in the western part of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."²⁰

One author presents overwhelming evidence showing "why the birth of modern science and the ensuing explosion of useful mathematical knowledge could only have occurred in Europe."²¹

The point of these statements is that the epistemological view of truth embraced by a culture has a telling impact upon its understanding of and pursuit of mathematical empirical science. A relativistic view of truth presents a shifting and unstable base upon which no rigid science may build.

¹⁹ Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*, (Crossway, 2005), 134.

²⁰ Reijer Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science*, (Regent College Publishing, 2000), 161.

²¹ James Nickel, *Mathematics: Is God Silent?* (Ross House Books, 2001), xxiv-xxv.

Douglas Groothuis says, “Human subjectivity un-tethered from objective constraints is a shallow and shabby thing. When it reaches a certain stage we call it stupidity or even insanity.”

Fundamentally, epistemological relativism, by its self-refutation, is a movement in the direction of irrationality. “There are is no absolute truth” is itself an assertion of a “truth-claim”. If it is true then it invalidates its own claim. If it is false, then once again its claim is invalidated.

Epistemological Pragmatism

The Secular City, Harvey Cox (1965)
Professor at Harvard University

In this book he gave a sociological and theological analysis for the decline of America into its present form of secularization. He talked about the shape of the American culture. He defined it as being determined by America’s only indigenous philosophical system called ‘pragmatism’.

Pragmatism, as a philosophical system, is born in a certain skepticism toward our ability to understand ultimate truth. So the philosophers and pioneers of pragmatism, who ironically belonged to the metaphysical club at Harvard, disowned any hope of discovering metaphysical truth. So they addressed themselves to the question of ‘how do we live in a world where we can’t discover ultimate truth?’ In this system, the “good” and the “true” was defined by what works.

“Pragmatism is perhaps America's most distinctive contribution to philosophy. Developed by Pierce, Dewey, and James in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, pragmatism holds that both the meaning and the truth of any idea is a function of its practical outcome. The pragmatists rejected all forms of absolutism and insisted that all principles be regarded as working hypotheses that must bear fruit in lived experience.”

Observe: Pragmatism is America’s deepest value being ultimately rooted in skepticism; skepticism about our ability to know absolute truth. Because Truth, as a category, is denied, the shift is made to the Good, but through the filter of pragmatism. For asserting that the category of Truth is unknowable, mankind must turn to the category of the Good. But here that which is Good is not determined by Truth, but by what works.

Said another way, having rejected the metaphysical category of Truth, mankind turned to action; i.e. the Good... the Good Way or Path... but now cut loose from the transcendental Truth, the only way to measure things is by “what works.

I would assert that much, very much, of contemporary Evangelicalism is operating out of this paradigm, this priority, of Pragmatism. Consider the content of the periodicals

various denominations put out... Many are focused almost exclusively upon “what is working”... pragmatism.

You see, the question is not being asked, “What is Truth” on this subject of Church Growth for instance. The question being asked is, “What is working?” Pragmatism.

The Nature of Truth

[The following is adapted from *The New Evidence that demands a verdict* by Josh McDowell]

“Traditionally, metaphysics has referred to the philosophical study of being as being, that is, of reality as it is in itself. Metaphysics answers the questions ‘What really is?’ and ‘What is its nature?’

Epistemology is defined as the theory of knowledge or how we come to know what we know.

What is Truth? Truth is that which corresponds to its referent (that to which it refers). As we have said before, truth is that which corresponds to reality; it reflects reality.

So a fundamental concept here is that Truth is correspondence with reality. Subjectivism, on the other hand, is the belief that truth or reality is determined internally by the subject or person. Subjectivism is a fundamental assumption of the post-modern mind.

Aristotle on “truth”:

“To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true; so that he who says of anything that it is, or that it is not, will say either what is true or what is false; but neither what is nor what is not is said to be or not to be.”

(Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4.7.1011b25-30. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Ed. By Jonathan Barnes. 2 volumes. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1984)

“Aristotle argues that truth relies on the actual existence of the thing which ha thought or statement is about: ‘If there is a man, the statement hereby we say that there is a man is true, and reciprocally – since if the statement whereby we say that there is a man is true, [then in reality] there is a man. And whereas the true statement is in no way the cause of the actual thing’s existence, the actual thing does seem in some way the cause of the statement’s being true: it is because the actual thing exists or does not that the statement is called true or false.’”

(Aristotle, *Categories*. 12. 14b15-22. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Ed. By Jonathan Barnes. 2 volumes. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1984.)

Thomas Aquinas on “truth”

“For all knowledge is achieved by way of some assimilation of the knower to the thing known, an assimilation which cause the knowledge: thus sight is aware of colour because it suffers modification by the kind of the colour. So the first way in which what exists relates to mind understanding it is by harmonizing with it – a harmonizing we call the matching of understanding and thing – and it is in this matching that the formal notion of truth is achieved.” (Aquinas, *On Truth*, 1.1)

“For the meaning of true consists in a matching of thing and understanding, and matching presupposes diversity, not identity. So the notion of truth is first found in understanding when understanding first starts to have something of its own which the external thing doesn’t have, yet which corresponds to the thing and can be expected to match it.” (Aquinas, *On Truth*, 1.3)

Peter Kreeft & Ronald Tacelli on “truth”

“All theories of truth, once they are expressed clearly and simply, presuppose the common-sensical notion of truth that is enshrined in the wisdom of language and the tradition of usage, namely the correspondence (or identity) theory. For each theory claims that it is really true, that is, that it corresponds to reality, and that the others are really false, that is, that they fail to correspond to reality.”

(Kreeft & Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, p. 366. Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 1994.

Norman Geisler on truth

“Truth is what corresponds to its referent [the idea to which a word refers]. Truth about reality is what corresponds to the way things really are. Truth is ‘telling it like it is.’ This correspondence applies to abstract realities as well as actual ones. There are mathematical truths. There are also truths about ideas. In each case there is a reality, and truth accurately expresses it. Falsehood, then, is what does not correspond. It tells it like it is not, misrepresenting the way things are. The intent behind the statement is irrelevant. If it lacks proper correspondence, it is false.”

(Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p.743. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998)

Mortimer Adler on truth

“Just as the truth of speech consists in the agreement or correspondence between what one says to another and what one thinks or says to oneself, so the truth of thought consists in the agreement or correspondence between what one thinks, believes, or opines and what actually exists or does not exist in the reality that is independent of our minds and of our thing one thing or another.”

(Adler, *Six Great Ideas*, p.34. New York: Macmillan, 1981.)

Consequences of Denying the Correspondence View:

Philosophically, lying is impossible without the correspondence theory of truth. For if there is not a necessary correspondence between words & the facts about which they purport to speak, they can never be factually incorrect. There cannot be any categorization of true or false.

Furthermore, all factual communication would break down. For if a statement I make does not relate to reality, then have I said anything useful or meaningful beyond my own virtual reality?

The very concept of teaching & learning is rooted in the correspondence view of truth.

No, the Laws of Logic are NOT created²²

Logic. Is it created?

The answer is, well, 'No'. Here is why:

1. God is eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. And Each Person is eternally Self-Identical and Personally Distinct.
3. And Each Person as Himself eternally loves Each Other.
4. Therefore, Each Person eternally thinks the laws of identity (the Father is the Father, etc.).
5. And Each Person eternally thinks the Law of Non-Contradiction (the Father is not the Son, etc.).
6. And these two laws, in eternal operation, imply further the law of the excluded middle.
7. Therefore, Logic is not created.

Note that this follows inexorably from the fact that God is a Trinity. Therefore, either God is eternally Triune and thinks the laws of logic eternally, or God does not eternally think the laws of logic eternally and is not Triune.

Clark explains this more eloquently than I could in his essay "God and Logic."
“

It is to be hoped that these remarks on the relation between God and truth will be seen as pertinent to the discussion of logic. In any case, the subject of logic can be more clearly introduced by one more Scriptural reference. The well-known prologue to John's Gospel may be paraphrased, "In the beginning was Logic, and Logic was with God, and Logic was God.... In logic was life and the life was the light of men."

This paraphrase-in fact, this translation-may not only sound strange to devout ears, it may even sound obnoxious and offensive. But the shock only measures the devout person's distance from the language and thought of the Greek New Testament. Why it is offensive to call Christ Logic, when it does not offend to call him a word, is hard to explain. But

²² Hiram, "No the Laws of Logic are not Created", blog title, January 18, 2013 at <http://involvedgenealogies.wordpress.com/2013/01/18/no-the-laws-of-logic-are-not-created/>

such is often the case. Even Augustine, because he insisted that God is truth, has been subjected to the anti-intellectualistic accusation of “reducing” God to a proposition. At any rate, the strong intellectualism of the word Logos is seen in its several possible translations: to wit, computation, (financial) accounts, esteem, proportion and (mathematical) ratio, explanation, theory or argument, principle or law, reason, formula, debate, narrative, speech, deliberation, discussion, oracle, sentence, and wisdom.

Any translation of John 1:1 that obscures this emphasis on mind or reason is a bad translation. And if anyone complains that the idea of ratio or debate obscures the personality of the second person of the Trinity, he should alter his concept of personality. In the beginning, then, was Logic.

That Logic is the light of men is a proposition that could well introduce the section after next on the relation of logic to man. But the thought that Logic is God will bring us to the conclusion of the present section. Not only do the followers of Bernard entertain suspicions about logic, but also even more systematic theologians are wary of any proposal that would make an abstract principle superior to God. The present argument, in consonance with both Philo and Charnock, does not do so. The law of contradiction is not to be taken as an axiom prior to or independent of God. The law is God thinking.

For this reason also the law of contradiction is not subsequent to God. If one should say that logic is dependent on God’s thinking, it is dependent only in the sense that it is the characteristic of God’s thinking. It is not subsequent temporally, for God is eternal and there was never a time when God existed without thinking logically. One must not suppose that God’s will existed as an inert substance before he willed to think.

As there is no temporal priority, so also there is no logical or analytical priority. Not only was Logic the beginning, but Logic was God. If this unusual translation of John’s Prologue still disturbs someone, he might yet allow that God is his thinking. God is not a passive or potential substratum; he is actuality or activity. This is the philosophical terminology to express the Biblical idea that God is a living God. Hence logic is to be considered as the activity of God’s willing.

Although Aristotle’s theology is no better (and perhaps worse) than his epistemology, he used a phrase to describe God, which, with a slight change, may prove helpful. He defined God as “thought-thinking-thought.” Aristotle developed the meaning of this phrase so as to deny divine omniscience. But if we are clear that the thought which thought thinks includes thought about a world to be created-in Aristotle God has no knowledge of things inferior to him-the Aristotelian definition of God as “thought-thinking-thought” may help us to understand that logic, the law of contradiction, is neither prior to nor subsequent to God’s activity.

This conclusion may disturb some analytical thinkers. They may wish to separate logic and God. Doing so, they would complain that the present construction merges two axioms into one. And if two, one of them must be prior; in which case we would have to accept God without logic, or logic without God; and the other one afterward. But this is

not the presupposition here proposed. God and logic are one and the same first principle, for John wrote that Logic was God. At the moment this much must suffice to indicate the relation of God to logic. We now pass to what at the beginning seemed to be the more pertinent question of logic and Scripture.”

Soli. Deo. Gloria. Hiram

The Centrality of the Principle of Non-contradiction

Aristotle posited two criteria for the most certain of the principles: “The most certain principle of all is that regarding which it is impossible to be mistaken; for such a principle must be both the best known and non-hypothetical. This, then, is the most certain of all principles, since it answers to the definition given above. For it is impossible for anyone to believe the same thing to be and not to be. This is naturally the starting point even for all the other axioms.” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4.3.1005b)

“We have now posited that it is impossible for anything at the same time to be and not to be, and by this means have shown that this is the most indisputable of all principles.” (*ibid*, 4.4.1006a)

Aquinas summarized the law of non-contradiction saying, “‘No one can ever conceive,’ says Aristotle, ‘one and the same thing can both be and not be.’ To think thus would be to affirm and deny in the same breath. It would destroy language, it would be to deny all substance, all truth, even all probability and all degrees of probability. It would be the suppression of all desire, all action. Even becoming and beginning would disappear, because if contradictories and contraries are identified [i.e., made the same], then the point of departure in motion is identified with the terminus and the thing supposed to be in motion would have arrived before it departed.” (Aquinas, *Metaphysics*, 4.3)

Aquinas said elsewhere, “the first indemonstrable principle is that the same thing cannot be affirmed and denied at the same time, which is based on the notion of being and not-being; and on this principle all others are based.” (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.2.94.2)

Mortimer Adler notes that non-contradiction, being, and reality are relative to one another: ‘Among the first principles of Greek logic is the rule governing truth and falsity of incompatible propositions: either that both cannot be true, though both may be false, or that one must be true and the other must be false. Underlying this rule is an ontological axiom – a truth about reality – that the Greeks thought was self-evident; namely, that nothing can both be and not be at the same time.’ (Adler, *Truth in Religion*. New York: Macmillan, 1990, p.10))

“The law of contradiction, as a statement about reality, says what is immediately obvious to common sense. A thing – whatever it may be – cannot both exist and not exist at the same time. It either exists or it does not exist, but not both at once. A thing cannot have a certain attribute and not have that attribute at the same time. The apple in my hand that I am looking at cannot, at this instance, be both red in color and not red in color.

This is so very obvious that Aristotle calls the law of contradiction self-evident. Its self-evidence, for him, means its undeniability. It is impossible to think that the apple is both red and not red at the same time.” (Adler, *Aristotle for Everybody: Difficult Thought Made Easy*. New York: Macmillan, 1978. p.140)

Consider eight inevitable consequences of denying the law of noncontradiction:

1. To deny the necessity and validity of the Principle of Contradiction would be to deprive words of their fixed meaning and render speech useless.
2. Reality of essences must be abandoned; there would be becoming without anything that becomes; flying without a bird; accidents without subjects in which to inhere.
3. There would be no distinction between things. All would be one. Ship, wall, man would all be the same thing.
4. It would mean the destruction of truth, for truth and falsity would be the same thing.
5. It would destroy all thought, even opinion, for its affirmation would be its negation.
6. Desire and preference would be useless, for there would be no difference between good and evil; there would be no reason to go home, for to go home would not be different from staying where one is.
7. Everything would be equally true and false at the same time, so that no opinion would be more wrong than any other even in degree.
8. It would make impossible all becoming, change, or motion. For all this implies a transition from one state of being to another; but if the Principle of Contradiction is false, all states of being are the same.

(Above list from - Sullivan, James Brown. “*An Examination of First Principles in Thought and Being in the Light of Aristotle and Aquinas*.” Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1939, p 121-122)

Again, Mortimer Adler argues that there is no evidence for a self-evident truth other than itself: “Truths called self-evident provide the most obvious examples of knowledge in the strong sense of that term. They are called self-evident because our affirmation of them does not depend on evidence marshaled in support of them nor upon reasoning designed to show that they are conclusions validly reached by inference. We recognize their truth immediately or directly from our understanding of what they assert. We are convinced – convinced, not persuaded – of their truth because we find it impossible to think the opposite of what they assert. We are in no sense free to think the opposite.” (Adler, *Six Great Ideas*. New York: Macmillan, 1981, p52)

Ravi Zacharias tells the following story which illustrates the futility of a denial of the principle of non-contradiction:

As the professor waxed eloquent and expounded on the law of non-contradiction, he eventually drew his conclusion: 'This [*either/or* logic] is a Western way of looking at reality. The real problem is that you are seeing contradiction as a Westerner when you should be approaching it as an Easterner. The *both/and* is the Eastern way of viewing reality.'

After he belabored these two ideas on *either/or* and *both/and* for some time, I finally asked if I could interrupt his unpunctuated train of thought and raise one question.

I said, 'Sir, are you telling me that when I am studying Hinduism I *either* use the *both/and* system of logic *or* nothing else?'

There was pin-drop silence for what seemed an eternity. I repeated my question: 'Are you telling me that when I am studying Hinduism I *either* use the *both/and* logic *or* nothing else? Have I got that right?'

He threw his head back and said, 'The *either/or* does seem to emerge, doesn't it?' 'Indeed, it does emerge,' I said. 'And as a matter of fact, even in India we look both ways before we cross the street – it is either the bus or me, not both of us.'

Do you see the mistake he was making? He was using the *either/or* logic in order to prove the *both/and*. The more you try to hammer the law of non-contradiction, the more it hammers you."²³

Natural Theology and Science

Scriptural foundations

Natural Theology is knowledge of God gained through the cosmos. This is in addition to and distinct from that knowledge Holy Scripture gives us of God.

General Revelation has been made available to all mankind through what is seen in the created realm. Calvin called this the *divinitatis sensum*, or "_____ " that resides in all people

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 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. (Romans 1:19, 20)

²³ Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?* (Word Publishing: Dallas, Texas, 1994), 129.

The heavens declare the glory of God... (Psalm 19:1)

Mediate General Revelation as seen in the cosmos itself. It has been mediated to us through the medium of the cosmos; that which is external to us.

Immediate General Revelation. What is in view here is the moral law with; what C.S. Lewis called the sense of moral “ought” ness.

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them... (Romans 2:14, 15)

Whereas General Revelation is that which God gives to all mankind, He has also spoken and given specific word revelation in the form of propositional truth claims.

Compare the contrast between Romans 1-2 & Hebrews 1...

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 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... For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them... (Romans 1:19, 20; 2:14, 15)

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... (Heb 1)

Observe the quantum leap, qualitatively, between general revelation & special revelation. Here in view is that distinction we may imagine between the pagan gazing at the stars pondering also his inner sense of guilt versus the Jew, his face in the sand, as the voice of God Almighty thunders from atop the mountain, “*Thou shalt not!*”

In Psalm 19:1-6 the focus is on general revelation.

The final 8 verses then shift & focus is on special revelation.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; 8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; 9 the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. 12 Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. 13 Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. 14 Let the

words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

In other words, Psalm 19 is the seminal text on God's Revelation to man.

Consider also the tightness of the statements in the New Testament.

15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:16-21)

Observe the prominence, priority & superiority of written word revelation as in the Scripture versus the category of visions, dreams even utterances as on the mountain.

KJV – "We have also a more sure word of prophecy" (vs.19)

NASV – "So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure" (vs.19)

* Observe that in the NASV, the word "*made*" in vs. 19 is italicized indicating it is NOT in the Greek text. Indeed, the footnote offers the alternate reading, *And we have the even surer prophetic word*. This alternate reading is very tight to the KJV, a very literalistic translation.

Bertrand Russell, one of the founders of logical positivism (Chapter 8), when asked what he would say to God if he found himself before Him, answered: "I should reproach him for not giving us enough evidence."

"Not only does God act objectively through his creation, which produces a general revelation of himself, this revelation goes on to produce a natural theology that serves as the basis for the universal guilt of all mankind." This is the essence of Romans 1:18-23.

The real question then is not "*What will happen to the poor innocent people in the wilderness who never hear the gospel?*"

The real question should be, "*How many innocent people are there out in the wilderness?*"

Scripture says there are none righteous, none who seek God.

Natural Theology, then, is the basis for universal guilt.

General revelation is then sufficient for damnation.

Only Special revelation is sufficient for salvation.

Arguments for the existence of God

For five centuries, from Aquinas to Kant, "the traditional arguments for the existence of God enjoyed a supremacy that was rarely challenged."²⁴

William James said most philosophy is meaningless because the questions raised, if answered, would be meaningless.

He gives the example of a hunting expedition he was on with two philosophers who were watching two squirrels chase each other around a tree. Philosopher A said to B, "Each squirrel circumambulates the tree. Does each squirrel also circumambulate the other squirrel?" "No," said B, "because they are always in motion and neither of them catches the other or stays still." "Yes they do", said A, "because circumambulation is a transitive relationship. If you circumambulate the tree you must circumambulate each other." "Not so", said B! They argued for half an hour, stalked off in opposite directions, called each other dunderheads and vowed not to speak to each other again.

Here we are on stage. Did anybody write the play? Or are we making it up as we go?

Dostoevsky said, "*If there is no God then _____*"!
But the corollary to that is that nothing is meaningful.

Freud, the atheistic father of psychoanalysis, classified religious faith as a species of insanity; collective insanity; which of course it is if it isn't true. It makes a difference!

Peter Kreeft offers this analysis, "When we speak of arguments for the existence of God, since we are speaking in the context of apologetics, rather than just philosophy, our fundamental goal is not simply to know or to prove but to lead people to the Truth.

So there is a subjective or personal dimension to apologetics as well as an objective and logical dimension. Neither may be dropped if you are going to do apologetics.

If you drop the subjective dimension you do only philosophy. And if you drop the objective dimension, you do only psychology.

²⁴ Sproul, 87.

Each argument for the existence of God has the same conclusion; so they are differentiated by their premises.” Consider that depending upon the source of their premises, the arguments may be classified into four groups: Purely conceptual, Practical, Cosmological (external) & Anthropological (internal).

The ONTOLOGICAL argument (a purely conceptual approach)

Here is a conceptual argument, arguing not from stuff, but from concepts.

The most famous version of this argument comes from Saint Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109. He wrote, "Thus even the fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be conceived is in the understanding, since when he hears this, he understands it; and whatever is understood is in the understanding. And certainly that than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be in the understanding alone. For if it is even in the understanding alone, it can be conceived to exist in reality also, which is greater. Thus if that than which a greater cannot be conceived is in the understanding alone, then that than which a greater cannot be conceived is itself that than which a greater can be conceived. But surely this cannot be. Thus without doubt something than which a greater cannot be conceived exists, both in the understanding and in reality."

Kreeft offers this shortened version, “God is defined as that than which a greater cannot be conceived. But a God that exists outside the mind is greater than a god that exists only inside the mind. Therefore, if the God outside the mind does not exist this god is not God; which is a self-contradiction because God is defined as the greatest that can be conceived. Therefore, God exists.”

Anselm' Argument may be summarized thus:

Premise One: God is, by definition, a being that which nothing greater can be conceived (imagined).

Premise Two: Existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind (virtual reality).

Conclusion: God therefore, must exist in reality. For if God did not He would not be that which nothing greater can be conceived (imagined).

Numbered steps:

1. God is the greatest possible being.
2. God exists at least in the mind or understanding.
3. A being who exists only in the mind is not so great as a being who exists in reality as well as in the mind.
4. If God existed only in the mind, eh would not be the greatest possible being.
5. Hence God must exists in reality as well as in the mind.

One contemporary philosopher, Norman Malcolm, argues “God is by definition a being who does not merely happen to exist. God can neither come into existence nor pass out of

existence, since a being who could do either simply would not be God. It follows from this that if God exists at all, then his existence is necessary. If he does not exist, then his existence is impossible. But either god exists or he does not exist, so God's existence is either necessary or impossible. **Since it does not seem plausible to say that God's existence is impossible, then it follows that his existence is necessary.** So if God's existence is possible, then it is necessary. More formally the argument can be put like this:

1. If God exists, his existence is necessary.
2. If God does not exist, his existence is impossible.
3. Either God exists or he does not exist.
4. God's existence is either necessary or impossible.
5. God's existence is possible (not impossible).
6. Therefore God's existence is necessary.²⁵

Alvin Plantinga defends a contemporary version asserting that "although the argument may not be a proof, it does show that it is reasonable to believe in God. The key premise, that God's existence is possible, although it may not be known, is a proposition which could reasonably be accepted: the argument shows the 'rational acceptability' of theism."²⁶

Critiques of ontological arguments begin with Gaunilo, a contemporary of St. Anselm. Perhaps the best known criticisms of ontological arguments are due to Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

However, as Bertrand Russell observed, it is much easier to be persuaded that ontological arguments are no good than it is to say exactly what is wrong with them. This helps to explain why ontological arguments have fascinated philosophers for almost a thousand years.

Two further observations of the benefit of the argument are:

First - Whether the ontological argument has any value as a proof or not, simple reflection upon it deepens our appreciation of God as a necessary being.

Second – "The argument also serves the function of 'smoking out' the atheist. If the argument is valid, then the person who wishes to deny that God exists must claim that God's existence is impossible. That may be a stronger claim than the person may initially have wished to make. This last point can be generalized into a moral which can be applied to all the theistic arguments. The arguments can be rejected, but the person who rejects them pays a price. **For to deny a proposition is logically equivalent to asserting another proposition.** To deny p is to assert

²⁵ Stephan Evans, *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith*, (InterVarsity Press, 1985), 49-50.

²⁶ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977), 112.

not-p. In some cases the assertions required to reject theistic arguments may be troublesome ones.”²⁷

Finally, C.S. Lewis says of the ontological argument, “I sometimes wonder whether the ontological argument did not itself arise as a partially unsuccessful translation of an experience without concepts or words. I don’t think we can initially argue from the concept of perfect Being to its existence.”²⁸

PASCAL’S WAGER (an argument from practicality)

As one philosopher has said, “There are two things that everybody wants: truth & happiness. So, while the skeptic disavows our ability to know truth about God, let’s consider the issue of the human pursuit of happiness.

If there is a God, and you believe in Him, then you attain eternal happiness.

Suppose there is no God, and you believe in Him, then there is no harm or loss after death.

But if you don’t believe in Him, and there is no God, it does not do you any harm; there is no life after death; no heaven or hell.

But, if there is a God, and you don’t believe in Him, then you have suffered irreparable loss.

The only possible combination by which you win is (1st) God exists, & (2nd) you believe in Him.

In contrast, the only possible way to lose is (1st) God exists, & (2nd) you refuse to believe in Him.

Or again, in Peter Kreeft’s words, “If God does not exist, it does not matter how you wager, for there is nothing to win after death and nothing to lose after death. But if God does exist, your only chance of winning eternal happiness is to believe, and your only chance of losing it is to refuse to believe. As Pascal says, “I should be much more afraid of being mistaken and then finding out that Christianity is true than of being mistaken in believing it to be true.” If you believe too much, you neither win nor lose eternal happiness. But if you believe too little, you risk losing everything.”²⁹

²⁷ Evans, 50.

²⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, chapter titled “The Language of Religion” (Eerdmans: 1967), 129ff.

²⁹ Peter Kreeft, <http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics/pascals-wager.htm>

The COSMOLOGICAL argument (from things external to us)

Cosmological arguments infer, from the existence of the cosmos, the existence of God. Sometimes this is called a “first-cause argument” in that it infers God’s existence as the first or ultimate cause of the universe.

The historical roots of this argument go back to Aristotle who in his book, *Metaphysics*, set forth the idea of an “unmoved Mover”.

Much deeper development of this argument was made in the Medieval period by Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus.

But what is it about the universe that supports the claim that it requires a cause and that its cause must be God? The answer is **contingency**.

No matter how we might slice the universe that which we see does not give the appearance of a thing which exists necessarily. Rather, all the cosmos gives the appearance of being contingent; that is they exist but they not only might not have but also may not continue to do so.

The Oxford Philosophical Dictionary defines contingency as _____

The obvious question then is, **Why does anything exist at all if all the cosmos is contingent?**

Now observe, if the cause of a contingent thing is itself contingent then we have answered nothing. Ultimately, the explanation of the causation behind contingent things must be a necessary thing. And for the theist the most logical necessary thing is also a being, a being which cannot, nor could not have failed to exist, who is the cause of the existence of all things contingent.

The key elements of this argument are as follows:

1. Some contingent beings exist.
2. If any contingent beings exist, then a necessary being must exist (because contingent beings require a necessary being as their ultimate cause).
3. Therefore there exists a necessary being (which is the ultimate cause of the existence of contingent beings)

Now observe that if we admit that some particular pieces of reality exist which are contingent. This being true, all contingent things must have been caused. Those things “caused” are “effects”.

So if there is the real existence of “effects” which are contingent, there must be something which has been in existence from all eternity past and is therefore necessary in its existence.

Observe that the denial of this is to assert that there was a time when there were no effects and no causes. In essence, it is to assert a time when there was nothing.

But if there was a time when there was nothing, and now we admit that there is something, what we are saying is that when nothing existed, something was caused, out of nothing, to come into existence.

In other words, the cosmos, before it existed, brought itself into existence.

But this is a flat denial of the Law of Non-Contradiction. A thing cannot both be and not be at the same time. The cosmos could not have not existed and yet at the same time existed so as to bring itself into existence. This is absurd. It is irrational.

Thus, the non-theist is driven to conclude that the cosmos itself is eternal. For if anything exists, there has to have been something which existed from eternity past.

But have we not then implied that one of the features of the theistic God is actually a feature of the natural world? And is this not to implicitly embrace a rival metaphysical explanation which if it is not pantheism is incredibly close to it?

The Christian Apologetic website **4truth.net** has an excellent analysis by David Beck.

Point 1: What we observe and experience in this universe is contingent.

Point 2: A system of causally dependent contingent things cannot be infinite.

Point 3: The system of causally dependent contingent things must be finite.

Conclusion: There must be a first cause in the system of contingent causes.

(<http://www.4truth.net/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=hiKXLbPNLrF&b=778665&ct=1270699>)

Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry has this simple version

1st – Things exist.

2nd – It is possible for those things to not exist (contingency)

3rd – Whatever has the possibility of non-existence, yet exists, has been caused to exist. Something cannot bring itself into existence since it must exist to bring itself into existence. This is illogical.

4th - There cannot be an infinite number of causes to bring something into existence. Because an infinite regression of causes ultimately has no initial cause which means there is no cause of existence. Since the universe exists, & is clearly contingent, it must have a cause.

5th - Therefore, there must be an uncaused cause of all contingent things.

6th – The uncaused Cause (Aristotle's 'unmoved Mover') is the Judeo-Christian Creator God.
(<http://www.carm.org/apologetics/cosmological.htm>)

Scientific confirmation of something like the Contingency theory has come through Big Bang Cosmology.

Several decades back scientists were divided into three groups as to the origin of the universe.

The Steady State theory (the universe has always been here)

"Proposed in 1948 by Hermann Bondi, Thomas Gold, and Fred Hoyle, the steady-state theory was based on an extension of something called the perfect cosmological principle. This holds that the universe looks essentially the same from every spot in it and at every time. (This applies only to the universe at large scales; obviously planets, stars, and galaxies are different from the space between them.)

Obviously, for the universe to look the same at all times, there could have been no beginning or no end. This struck a philosophical chord with a number of scientists, and the steady-state theory gained many adherents in the 1950s and 1960s. How could the universe continue to look the same when observations show it to be expanding, which would tend to thin out its contents? Supporters of this cosmology balanced the ever-decreasing density that results from the expansion by hypothesizing that matter was continuously created out of nothing. The amount required was undetectably small—about a few atoms for every cubic mile each year.

The steady-state theory began to wither in the 1960s. First, astronomers discovered quasars, the highly luminous cores of very distant galaxies. Because the vast majority of quasars lie exceedingly far away, their existence proves that the perfect cosmological principle cannot be true—the distant and therefore ancient universe is not the same as the younger universe nearby. The death knell for the theory sounded when radio astronomers Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson discovered the cosmic microwave background, the leftover radiation from the Big Bang. The steady-staters had no reasonable way to explain this radiation, and their theory slowly faded away as so many of its predecessors had."

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/hawking/universes/html/univ_steady.html

The Oscillation theory (the universe continually expands & contracts)

"The absolute certainty of the Second Law has also been declared by Sir Arthur Eddington, professor of astronomy at Cambridge University in England;

The law that entropy always increases (the Second Law of Thermodynamics) holds, I think, the supreme position among the laws of nature. If someone points out to you that your pet theory of the universe is in disagreement with Maxwell's equations [on electricity], then so much the worse for Maxwell's equations... But if your theory is found to be against the Second Law of Thermodynamics, I can give you no hope; There is nothing for it but to collapse in deepest humiliation."

Even if sufficient dark matter can be found, the Second Law of Thermodynamics poses another insurmountable problem for the Oscillation Model. Applied to the cosmos, the Second Law demands the total available energy in the universe will diminish as time progresses. Without a doubt, the expenditure of an enormous amount of energy. The Second Law assures that energy expended to expand the universe in one Big Bang is never recycled for the next Big Bang or expansion event. It is dissipated as unreclaimable heat. Therefore, all the energy in the universe will eventually be lost in unreclaimable form.

The example of a bouncing ball will help to illustrate this point. When a ball is dropped on the ground, we notice that it never bounce back as high as when it first dropped. This is lost in the form of heat. Therefore, less energy is available to push the ball back up into the air, just as the Second Law predicts. After each successive bounce, the ball goes up less and less until all the energy used to raise the ball in the first place is dissipated as heat. The Oscillation Model, in effect, proposes that a dropped ball would continue to bounce forever.

Again, Hugh Ross states; A ball with high mechanical efficiency, for example a volleyball blown up to high air pressure, may bounce a dozen times before it comes to a stop on the floor. A ball with a low mechanical efficiency, for example a very soft foam-rubber ball, may bounce only twice before it stops."

<http://www.hope-of-israel.org/crunch.htm>

The Big Bangers (there has been just one 'big bang'; & every since the universe has been constantly expanding)

"The Big Bang theory is an effort to explain what happened at the very beginning of our universe. Discoveries in astronomy and physics have shown beyond a reasonable doubt that our universe did in fact have a beginning. Prior to that moment there was nothing; during and after that moment there was something: our universe. The big bang theory is an effort to explain what happened during and after that moment.

According to the standard theory, our universe sprang into existence as "singularity"

around 13.7 billion years ago. What is a "singularity" and where does it come from? Well, to be honest, we don't know for sure. Singularities are zones which defy our current understanding of physics. They are thought to exist at the core of "black holes." Black holes are areas of intense gravitational pressure. The pressure is thought to be so intense that finite matter is actually squished into infinite density (a mathematical concept which truly boggles the mind). These zones of infinite density are called "singularities." Our universe is thought to have begun as an infinitesimally small, infinitely hot, infinitely dense, something - a singularity. Where did it come from? We don't know. Why did it appear? We don't know.

After its initial appearance, it apparently inflated (the "Big Bang"), expanded and cooled, going from very, very small and very, very hot, to the size and temperature of our current universe. It continues to expand and cool to this day and we are inside of it: incredible creatures living on a unique planet, circling a beautiful star clustered together with several hundred billion other stars in a galaxy soaring through the cosmos, all of which is inside of an expanding universe that began as an infinitesimal singularity which appeared out of nowhere for reasons unknown. This is the Big Bang theory.

Big Bang Theory - Common Misconceptions

There are many misconceptions surrounding the Big Bang theory. For example, we tend to imagine a giant explosion. Experts however say that there was no explosion; there was (and continues to be) an expansion. Rather than imagining a balloon popping and releasing its contents, imagine a balloon expanding: an infinitesimally small balloon expanding to the size of our current universe.

Another misconception is that we tend to image the singularity as a little fireball appearing somewhere in space. According to the many experts however, space didn't exist prior to the Big Bang. Back in the late '60s and early '70s, when men first walked upon the moon, "three British astrophysicists, Steven Hawking, George Ellis, and Roger Penrose turned their attention to the Theory of Relativity and its implications regarding our notions of time. In 1968 and 1970, they published papers in which they extended Einstein's Theory of General Relativity to include measurements of time and space."¹
² According to their calculations, time and space had a finite beginning that corresponded to the origin of matter and energy."³ The singularity didn't appear *in* space; rather, space began inside of the singularity. Prior to the singularity, *nothing* existed, not space, time, matter, or energy - nothing. So where and in what did the singularity appear if not in space? We don't know. We don't know where it came from, why it's here, or even where it is. All we really know is that we are inside of it and at one time it didn't exist and neither did we.

<http://www.big-bang-theory.com/>

Ravi Zacharias describes dinner with a few scientists when the topic turned "the conflict between naturalism's starting point – nature and nature alone – and supernaturalism's starting point, which is that God is the only sufficient explanation for our origin.

I asked them a couple of question. *'If the Big Bang were indeed where it all began [which one can fairly well grant, at least to this point in science's thinking], may I ask what preceded*

the Big Bang? ' Their answer, which I had anticipated, was that the universe was shrunk down to a singularity.

I pursued, '*But isn't it correct that a singularity as defined by science is a point at which all the laws of physics break down?*' '*That is correct,*' was the answer. '*Then, technically, your starting point is not scientific either.*' There was silence, and their expressions betrayed the scurrying mental searches for an escape hatch."³⁰

Jana Levin handout...

The TELEOLOGICAL argument (from things external to us)

The teleological argument is also known as the argument from design. Quite simply, it states that a designer must exist since the universe and living things exhibit marks of design in their order, consistency, unity, and pattern.

As was true of the cosmological argument, the teleological argument has its historical roots in classical Greece.

The famous Watchmaker version was given by William Paley (1743-1805). The argument goes as follows. If you found a watch in an empty field, you would logically conclude that it was designed and not the product of random formation. Paley's argument is as follows:

- 1st - Human artifacts are products of intelligent design.
- 2nd - The universe resembles human artifacts
- 3rd - Therefore the universe is a product of intelligent design.
- 4th - But the universe is complex and gigantic, in comparison to human artifacts.
- 5th - Therefore, there probably is a powerful and vastly intelligent designer who created the universe.

So the teleological argument begins from the fact that the cosmos appears to exhibit order or design, indicating purpose & intentionality; & hence a designer. Aquinas's version illustrates this.

"The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see things which lack knowledge, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that they achieve their end, not fortuitously, but designedly. Now whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is directed by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God." {*Summa Theologica* 1.2.3.)

³⁰ Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods* (W. Publishing Group, 2002), 64.

Aquinas points to two features which when found in nature imply design. The first is **order**. The second is **value**. In other words, the order in nature that things “act always or nearly always in the same way”, brings about results which are a “beneficial order”; a “good”.

Thus a simple flow of this argument is...

- 1st – There exist in nature many examples of beneficial order.
- 2nd – Beneficial order is best explained as the result of an intelligent designer.
- 3rd – Therefore, nature is probably the result of an intelligent designer.

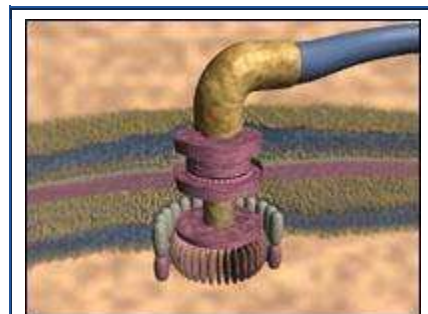
While this argument does not provide a syllogistic checkmate, it does have considerable force showing that the idea of a designer behind what appears to be designed is a very plausible hypothesis.

Stephen Evans, in *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith*, draws an interesting comparison.

“To a certain extent, however, the defects of the cosmological and teleological arguments cancel each other out. The cosmological argument concludes that a necessary being who is the cause of the universe must exist, but it does not on its face show that this cause must be personal. The teleological argument attempts to show that the cause of the universe must be intelligent and therefore personal, but it does not on its face show that this being must be a necessary being. Clearly, the two arguments complement each other and therefore could be viewed not as separate arguments but as parts of a general case for the plausibility of theism.”³¹

The Teleological argument has received a substantial increase in credibility through advances made in Biochemistry.

Primer: Intelligent Design Theory in a Nutshell



Many proponents of intelligent

³¹ Evans, 67-68.

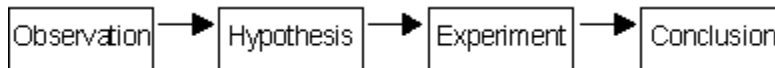
The theory of intelligent design holds that certain features of the universe and living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, and are not the result of an undirected, chance-based process such as Darwinian evolution.

design have cited the bacterial flagellum as an example of intelligent design and irreducible complexity in the cell. Graphic courtesy of the Access Research Network (ARN.org).

Intelligent design begins with observations about the types of information produced by intelligent agents. Even the atheist zoologist Richard Dawkins says that intuitively, "biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose." Darwinists believe natural selection did the "designing" but intelligent design theorist Stephen C. Meyer notes, "in all cases where we know the causal origin of 'high information content,' experience has shown that intelligent design played a causal role."

Intelligent design implies that life is here as a result of the purposeful action of an intelligent designer, standing in contrast to Darwinian evolution, which postulates that life exists due to the chance, purposeless, blind forces of nature.

Intelligent Design through the Scientific Method:



i. Observation:

The ways that intelligent agents act can be observed in the natural world and described. When intelligent agents act, it is observed that they produce high levels of "complex-specified information" (CSI). CSI is basically a scenario which is unlikely to happen (making it complex), and conforms to a pattern (making it specified). Language and machines are good examples of things with much CSI. From our understanding of the world, high levels of CSI are always the product of intelligent design.

ii. Hypothesis:

If an object in the natural world was designed, then we should be able to examine that object and find the same high levels of CSI in the natural world as we find in human-designed objects.

iii. Experiment:

We can examine biological structures to test if high CSI exists. When we look at natural objects in biology, we find many machine-like structures which are specified, because they have a particular arrangement of parts which is necessary for them to function, and complex because they have an unlikely arrangement of many interacting parts. These biological machines are "irreducibly complex," for any change in the nature or arrangement of these parts would destroy their function. Irreducibly complex structures cannot be built up through an alternative theory, such as Darwinian evolution, because Darwinian evolution requires that a biological structure be functional along every small-step of its evolution. "Reverse engineering" of these structures shows that they cease to function if changed even slightly.

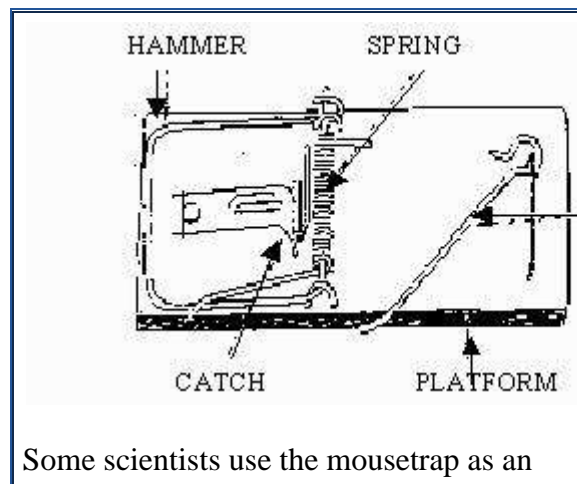
iv. Conclusion:

Because they exhibit high levels of CSI, a quality known to be produced only by intelligent design, and because there is no other known mechanism to explain the origin of these "irreducibly complex" biological structures, we conclude that they were intelligently designed.

<http://www.ideacenter.org/contentmgr/showdetails.php/id/1136>

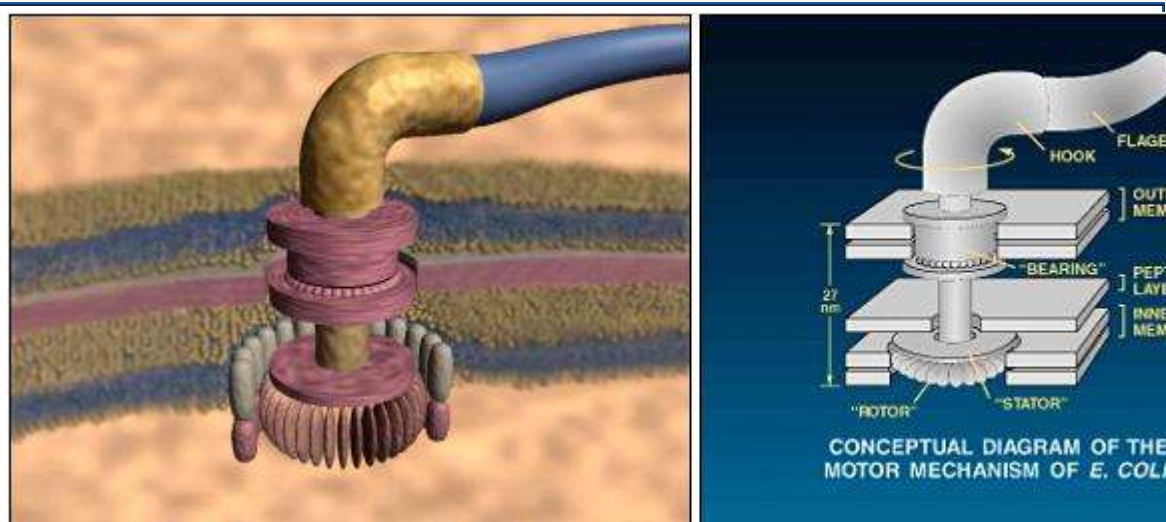
Primer: Irreducible Complexity in a Nutshell

In *The Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin wrote: *If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.*



example of an irreducibly complex machine. The mousetrap has 5 essential parts: a hammer, a spring, a catch, a platform, and a holding bar. If any parts are missing, the trap will be unable to perform its function: catching mice!

There are many biological organs which function like "machines": they work only if all their parts are present. If one part is removed, the entire machine "breaks down." These are called "irreducibly complex." Evolution cannot build irreducibly complex structures because evolution requires that biological structures arise in small steps, each of which allows for the structure to perform some function. For irreducibly complex organs, the organ is only functional if all parts are present. In this "all or nothing" game, intermediate stages of evolution are impossible because they would not function. Irreducibly complex biological features thus cannot be built in a "step-by-step" evolutionary manner. As evolutionist Robert Carroll asks, "how can we explain the gradual evolution of entirely new structures, like the wings of bats, birds, and butterflies, when the function of a partially evolved wing is almost impossible to conceive."



Some of the "simplest" bacterial cells contain this "bacterial flagellum," which functions like an outboard motor for swimming bacteria. Here are some of its engine specs:

- ☐ Water-cooled rotary engine, driven by proton motor force.
- ☐ Self-assembled and repair.
- ☐ Over 250 polypeptides make up over 30 structural parts.
- ☐ Each structure must be attached with an exact periodicity along the microtubules.

- ☐ In some cases has 2 gears (forward and reverse).
- ☐ Operates at speeds usually around 17,000 rpm but seen as high as 100,000 rpm.

Some scientists believe the flagellum is irreducibly complex because all its parts must be present to function. There is no plausible scenario under which such biological complexity could arise through mutation and natural selection. The flagellum works like a designed machine.

<http://www.ideacenter.org/contentmgr/showdetails.php/id/1142>

Strengths of the argument

This argument is simple to understand and has merit since humans are designers by nature and it is natural to think in terms of things having purpose. Fundamentally, it is consistent with Rom. 1:20, *"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."*

I think the teleological argument carries weight because it is consistent with Scripture. The Bible states that we are made in God's image. Therefore, there are certain things that we will resonate with. Even though the unbeliever suppresses the truth of God in his unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18-32), the truth is still there; and deep down he knows it.

Additional Resources:

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/> (Ken Hamm)

<http://www.icr.org/> (Institute for Creation Research)

"The Imminent Death of Darwinism and the Rise of Intelligent Design" - by Gregory J. Brewer, Ph.D. Dr. Brewer is Professor of Neurology and Medical Microbiology at Southern Illinois University.
(<http://www.icr.org/index.php?module=articles&action=view&ID=333>)

The Case for a Creator, Lee Strobel; "The evidence of biochemistry: The complexity of molecular machines" (ch 8)

Anthropological or Inner arguments

The anthropological or inner arguments come from the human soul because since we are made in God's image there are three distinct things that we alone can do that God can do. **We can know the Truth, we can love the Good and we can enjoy Beauty.** There is no other form of life in the physical universe that can do these three things.

Our souls manifest a resonance with what we might call the prophetic, the kingly, & the priestly; intellect, will & imagination. There are two primary arguments the focus of which comes from the realm of Goodness, the kingly or the will.

One is about the will's connection with morality. The other is about the will's connection with happiness.

The Moral Argument is that there is this sense of "oughtness". If there is no God how do you explain this reality found in all humanity? Why does all mankind experience a sense of moral law pressing down on them?

The other argument from the will is the Argument from Happiness; called the Argument from Desire. But observe that the ancients did not separate between morality and happiness. There was the understanding that happiness and duty were intrinsically linked.

The MORAL argument for the existence of God

"The roots of the moral argument go back, philosophically, to Plato's conviction that the source of all reality and truth must be the *'form of the Good'* and, religiously to the biblical teaching that moral obligations must be understood as divine commands. Although not popular among philosophers, **this argument probably is more convincing to ordinary people than any other. The voice of conscience is still regarded by many as the voice of God.**

The fact that the argument is not so popular among philosophers as among ordinary people might appear to count strongly against it, but I am not sure this is so. Fashions come and go in philosophy as in any other field, so the fact that an argument is not currently fashionable is not terribly significant. It is plausible to think, however, that if there is a God and if it is important for human beings to know about him, then God would make it possible for 'ordinary people' to know about him. That the moral argument is often convincing to unsophisticated people, while not impressive evidence for its truth, certainly does not count against it." (Evans, p. 68 – 79)

Immanuel Kant developed a type of moral argument. "The underlying insight seems to be this: it is unreasonable to try to realize moral ideals in the universe if the universe, and the laws whereby results in it are achieved, are indifferent to morality. The rational moral

agent must see the universe as the arena for moral endeavor and so must believe that a moral reality lies behind the natural order.” (Evans, p.69)

Listen to it again: **rationality must see the universe as the arena for moral endeavor and so must believe that a moral reality lies behind the natural order!**

One of the best & by lay-persons understandable presentations of this moral argument is that given by C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*.

Ravi Zacharias

“Some time ago I was speaking at a university in England, when a rather exasperated person in the audience made his attack upon God. “There cannot possibly be a God,” he said, “with all the evil and suffering that exists in the world!”

I asked, “When you say there is such a thing as evil, are you not assuming that there is such a thing as good?” “Of course,” he retorted.

“But when you assume there is such a thing as good, are you not also assuming that there is such a thing as a moral law on the basis of which to distinguish between good and evil?” “I suppose so,” came the hesitant and much softer reply.

“If, then, there is a moral law,” I said, “you must also posit a moral law giver. But that is who you are trying to disprove and not prove. If there is no transcendent moral law giver, there is no absolute moral law. If there is no moral law, there really is no good. If there is no good there is no evil. I am not sure what your question is!”

There was silence and then he said, “What, then, am I asking you?” He was visibly jolted that at the heart of his question lay an assumption that contradicted his own conclusion.

You see friends, the skeptic not only has to give an answer to his or her own question, but also has to justify the question itself. And even as the laughter subsided I reminded him that his question was indeed reasonable, but that his question justified my assumption that this was a moral universe. **For if God is not the author of life, neither good nor bad are meaningful terms.**

[**Slice of Infinity**, Thursday, February 10, 2000, *The Polemic Shot In the Foot*, Ravi Zacharias]

The Argument from DESIRE (by Peter Kreeft)

**A Historical Overview of Western Philosophy – Third “LOOK”
[Handout...#3]**

The Case for Biblical Authority”

As we turn to the subject of the case for Biblical Authority, the question comes as to which comes first; Scripture or the knowledge of God? It is my belief that the Classical approach is the methodology of God’s interaction with man. For Scripture asserts that before Special Revelation, there first existed General Revelation. Before the oracles of God there existed a clear witness to and knowledge of God (Romans 1).

This is traditionally framed as the debate between Presuppositional Apologetics and Classical Apologetics.

This is the debate between those that say, ‘The Bible says it is God’s word. I believe it and that’s all I need to know!’ and the Classical Apologetic approach with its sequential order of Natural Theology first followed by the claims of Scripture.

The Authority of the Bible (Chapter 20)

Jesus asserted Seven Truths about the Old Testament³²

1. The Old Testament is Divinely Authoritative

Observe that in the temptation account, Jesus counters Satan by quoting from the Old Testament. Each of the three responses begins with His words, *“It is written!”*

“Why would Jesus so confidently quote from the Old Testament if the Old Testament was not authoritative? He must have considered the Old Testament to be a source of truth in order to dismiss his most powerful enemy with it. In fact, on ninety-two occasions Jesus and his apostles support their position by saying “it is written” (or the equivalent) and then quoting the Old Testament. Why? Because Jesus and his apostles considered the Old Testament Scriptures to be the written Word of God, and thus the ultimate authority for life.”

2. The Old Testament is Imperishable

Observe that in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ claimed that not one of the smallest markings in Scripture would ever perish or pass away!

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven

³² Norm Geisler, Frank Turek & David Limbaugh, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith To Be An Atheist*, (Crossway, 2004), 357ff

and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:17; ESV)

3. The Old Testament is Infallible

When Jesus was about to be stoned for alleged blasphemy, He cited the Old Testament declaring, *“Scripture cannot be broken!”* (John 10:35; ESV)
In other words, under the duress of threatened violence, Christ referred to an infallible authority, one that could not fail – Scripture.

4. The Old Testament is Inerrant

Observe Christ’s correction of the Sadducees, *“You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.”* (Matthew 22:29; ESV)
Observe also His terse statement in His High Priestly prayer, *“Your word is truth.”* (John 17:17; ESV)

5. The Old Testament is Historically Reliable

Note that Christ affirmed two of the most historically challenged stories in the Old Testament: Noah and Jonah

“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark...” (Matthew 24:36-38; ESV)

“But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”
(Matthew 12:39-40; ESV)

Christ furthermore asserted that Daniel was a prophet (Matthew 24:15) and that Isaiah was behind the authorship of the book bearing his name, thus not once suggesting the two or three author theory of higher criticism (Matt 7:6-7; 13:14-15; Luke 4:17-19).

6. The Old Testament is Scientifically Accurate

When asked if divorce was acceptable, Jesus cited a scientific fact out of Genesis. *“He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall*

become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:4-6)

In other words, the nature of marriage is bound up in the creation design; a scientific truth claim of Scripture.

Observe Christ's response to Nicodemus

"In other words, Jesus taught that if the Bible does not speak truthfully about the physical world that you can see, then it cannot be trusted when it speaks about the spiritual world that you cannot see. Indeed, Christianity is built on historical events – such as Creation and the Resurrection – that can be tested through scientific and historical investigation. While adherents of other religions may accept a complete separation from science, Christians do not. Truth about the universe cannot be contradictory. Since all truth is God's truth, religious beliefs must agree with scientific facts. If they do not, then either there is an error in our scientific understanding, or our religious beliefs are wrong."

7. Christ asserted the Old Testament has Ultimate Supremacy

Christ corrected the Pharisees and teachers of the law by claiming they should be obeying the Old Testament Scriptures instead of their own man-made traditions. He said, *"And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?... So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God."* (Matthew 15:3,6)

He then rebuked them for failing to live up to the Scriptures by quoting from the Old Testament: *"You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"* (Matthew 15:7-9)

E. Jesus asserted the historical truthfulness of the Old Testament

Jesus affirmed the historicity of both Noah & the Flood - Matthew 24:37-39

Jesus affirmed the historicity of Jonah & the "great fish" Matthew 12:40

Jesus affirmed the historicity of the Creation - Mark 13:19

Jesus affirmed the historicity of Adam & Eve - Matthew 19:4-5

Jesus affirmed the historicity of Sodom & Gomorrah - Luke 10:12

Jesus affirmed the historicity of Moses and the burning bush - Luke 20:37

While Christ confirmed the Old Testament, He promised the New

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14:25-26)

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” (John 16:12-13)

The fulfillment of this promise is explicitly and implicitly claimed throughout the New Testament writings. This is a specific focus of Systematic Theology under the Doctrine of Holy Scripture.

Scripture claims the apostles’ teaching to be on the level of Scripture (Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 5:18; Luke 10:7; Matthew 10:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Galatians 1:11-12; 2 Peter 3:15-16; 2 Timothy 3:15-16; 2 Peter 1:16-21)

The Trustworthiness of the Teaching of Jesus (Chapter 22)

First establish the historical verifiability of Scripture

Then establish a reasoned judgment on the Person of Jesus

Having established the trustworthiness of the verifiable claims of Scripture, the next step is to make a reasoned judgment on the Person of Jesus Christ.

“To state the argument in a nutshell: first, we must show that the biblical record is historically reliable, then we must move to the biblical writers’ description of Jesus’ flawless character. Once that is established, we can judge his claims of prophecy to be reliable because his character is reliable, as attested by the historically reliable biblical accounts. If, then, the accuracy of his teaching is established, we can easily accept his teaching on Scripture – that it is the very Word of God.”³³

But what of Theological Liberalism?

If Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, then certain implications are necessary. One is that what He said about Scripture is accepted as authoritatively true!

³³ Sproul, 181.

Recognize the foundational issue: **The Doctrine of Christ** (2 John 9, 10) “In the final analysis, the argument for the authority of Scripture within the church is reduced to a Christological argument.” (Sproul, p.182)

The trustworthiness of Christ’s High View of Scripture

G. The Testimony of the Holy Spirit (Chapter 23)

Stubborn Hard Hearts... Blind Minds

The will/volition is where the choice is made

“Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” (John 8:47)

What if the one you are talking to is not “*of the truth*”? What if his heart is not inclined in the direction of wanting truth? What if deep down he does not want life-changing truth?

Intent Precedes Content! The Inclination of the heart pre-determines *what* the mind hears and *how* what is heard is understood!

This is why the Scripture constantly holds the priority of the “heart” before us.

Conclusion:

“The first move for us, then, in this apologetic endeavor, is to present persuasive arguments for the existence of God. We want to do this in such a way that to deny God’s existence would be an obvious affirmation of absurdity. We focus on those things that all people must confirm in order to maintain some semblance of sanity in their lives: the four foundations of knowledge that we considered in chapters 3-8. As we have seen, denying any one of these foundations leads to absurdity, while following them to their ultimate end can only point to a rational Creator. We are all created in the image of this God; at the very least we have that in common with the unregenerate person. For this reason, the starting point in our apologetic task will be nothing less than exploring those commonalities – and then letting the Holy Spirit do his work.”³⁴

³⁴ Sproul, 193.

Is The Bible Historically Reliable?

“How do we know that the text of the Bible as we have it today, having come to us through many translations and versions over the centuries, is not just a pale reflection of the original? What guarantee do we have that deletions and embellishments have not totally obscured the original message of the Bible? What difference does the historical accuracy of the Bible make? Surely the only thing that counts is the message!

But Christianity is rooted in history. Jesus Christ was counted in a Roman census. If the Bible’s historical references are not true, grave questions may be raised. Also, are the spiritual parts of its message true, encased as they are in historical events? Are the books now included in the Bible substantially the same document the people had two thousand years ago? How do we know whether other books should have been included? These questions and others are worthy of answers.”³⁵

(1st) **Current epistemological pre-suppositions & the Bible** (handout)

“The Authority of the Bible”, from *The Origin of the Bible*, Carl Henry, 13-20)

(2nd) **The Tests of Historiography**

In his book, *Introduction in Research in English Literary History*, C. Sanders, military historian, sets forth three tests of reliability employed in general historiography and literary criticism.

- (1) The Bibliographical Test - Since we don’t have the ‘autographs’ [the original copies] how accurate & reliable are the ‘extant’ copies [the manuscripts we do have?
- (2) The Internal evidence (what the document claims for itself)
- (3) The External evidence (how the document squares or aligns itself with facts, dates, persons from the time frame it claims to report)

The Bibliographical Test

Two fundamental questions are focused on here:

- (1) The quantity of extant manuscripts &
 - (2) the time span between the autographs & the existing manuscript copies
- The Old Testament does not have the sheer volume of manuscript evidence as the New.

However, the reverent & trembling approach with which the Jews approached the copying of Scripture speaks highly for our confidence in the Hebrew manuscripts we have.

³⁵ Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe*, (IVP Books, 2008), 59.

“A Jewish man who embraced the responsibility of preserving the integrity of the Hebrew Scriptures was called a *sofer*, Hebrew for "scribe." These devout men were masters in the art of writing and calligraphy, and systematic in their methods for copying the Scriptures. In fact, there are still *sofer* scribes today who, despite the invention of the printing press and modern technology, faithfully copy the Scriptures by hand in much the same what [sic] their ancestors did.

The Talmud, a book of Jewish law, outlines how a scribe is to write the letters of the Hebrew Scriptures, also called the "Torah." The letters of the Torah could only be written in square letters called *K'tav Ashuri*. This would be like saying an English text could only be written in a certain font, such as Times New Roman, not in cursive handwriting or another font. The purpose of this law is to preserve the text from errors over the centuries, for if one scribe wrote in their own handwriting, a scribe a century latter might misread a word and copy it differently (known as a variant). Variants are almost non-existent in ancient Hebrew Scriptures because of the faithfulness of the scribes.

There are many other rules scribes followed to preserve and pass down the Hebrew Scriptures. They could only use clean animal skins- "vellum" or "parchment." These skins were prepared for holy use by soaking in water for several days (for softening), soaked in lime water for several more days and scraped to remove all of the hairs, and then dried on a stretching rack. Ink also was prepared in a special way to be considered "kosher," or fit for use, by the scribe. No base metals could be used on the parchments, because metals such as iron, brass, and steel are also used to make weapons. Nothing that is ever used for killing could be used, so tools of silver, gold, and ivory were often used instead.

Many of the rules for copying the Scriptures dealt with the character and heart of the scribe himself. A scribe had to speak and sing aloud each word as he wrote it. They washed their hands before each writing session, not just to make them clean, but rather to prepare the heart and mind for performing the holy act of writing the Word of God. They also prayed before each session. Writing a Torah is a "mitzvah," a holy act. Before writing "Jehovah," the name of God, the scribe had to clean the pen and wash their entire bodies in a "*mikveh*," a pool of natural running water. In writing the Scriptures, scribes were careful to show great reverence and respect, even centuries before the Hebrew Scriptures were canonized, showing that from the earliest times these writing were recognized as God's Word.

To preserve the text of God's Word from error, scribes also took numerous precautions. Even though most scribes had the Scriptures memorized, they were not allowed to write a single word from memory. They must use the "*tikkun*," or perfect text that was passed down from the generations before. Every word had to be checked against the older copy before and after it was written. Once the page of parchment was complete, the letters, words, and paragraphs had to be counted

and be identical to the original document. Each letter had to be clear and legible, and no two letters could touch each other. If just one error occurred, the page had to be re-done.

Once a sheet of parchment was complete, it had to be checked by three rabbis before being sown [sic] with other parchment sheets into a complete Torah scroll. A complete torah scroll consists of about 250 parchment sheets and, if completely unrolled, can be up to 100 yards long! Even after the entire scroll was complete, however, it was reviewed again within thirty days. If one or two pages had errors, those errors could be corrected, and the scroll used, but if three or more parchment pages were found to contain errors, the entire scroll was unfit for use and had to be re-done!

An old and worn scroll was discontinued from use because of the possibility of someone using it to make a copy, and thereby making a mistake because of faded or smudged letters. Since the Jews never destroyed any document containing God's Word, they were stored or buried in a special hiding place called a "genizah," usually under or within a synagogue or Jewish cemetery."³⁶

See handout – *Facts for Skeptics of the New Testament*, Gregory Koukl

"Counting Greek copies alone, the New Testament is preserved in some 5,656 partial and complete manuscript portions that were copied by hand from the second through the fifteenth centuries."³⁷

"There are now more than 5,686 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Add over 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other early versions (MSS), and we have close to, if not more than, 25,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation. In comparison, Homer's Iliad is second, with only 643 manuscripts that still survive. The first complete preserved text of Homer dates from the thirteenth century."³⁸

"The importance of the sheer number of manuscript copies cannot be overstated. As with other documents of ancient literature, there are no known extant (currently existing) original manuscripts of the Bible. Fortunately, however, the abundance of manuscript copies makes it possible to reconstruct the original with virtually complete accuracy."³⁹

John Warwick Montgomery says that 'to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity,

³⁶ <http://biblemuseum.net/virtual/history/ancient2.htm>

³⁷ Norm Geisler & William Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible*, (Moody, 1986), 385.

³⁸ Charles Leach, *Our Bible: How We Got It*, (Moody Press, 1898), 145.

³⁹ Geisler & Nix, 386.

for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament.”⁴⁰

“In real terms, the New Testament is easily the best attested ancient writing in terms of the sheer number of documents, the time span between the events and the document, and the variety of documents available to sustain or contradict it. There is nothing in ancient manuscript evidence to match such textual availability and integrity.”⁴¹

The Internal Evidence Test

John Warwick Montgomery writes that literary critics still follow Aristotle’s dictum that “the benefit of the doubt is to be given to the document itself, not arrogated by the critic to himself.” Questions here include: Is the document free of known contradictions and did the writer use Primary Sources?

The External Evidence Test

“Do other historical materials confirm or deny the internal testimony provided by the documents themselves?”⁴² In other words what extra-biblical writings are there that either deny or substantiate the accuracy, reliability and authenticity of the New Testament?

“The primary sources for the life of Christ are the four Gospels. However there are considerable reports from non-Christian sources that supplement and confirm the Gospel accounts. These come largely from Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Samaritan sources of the first century. In brief they inform us that:

- (1) Jesus was from Nazareth;
- (2) He lived a wise and virtuous life;
- (3) He was crucified in Palestine under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius Caesar at Passover time, being considered the Jewish King;
- (4) He was believed by his disciples to have been raised from the dead three days later;
- (5) His enemies acknowledged that he performed unusual feats they called ‘sorcery’;
- (6) His small band of disciples multiplied rapidly, spreading even as far as Rome;
- (7) His disciples denied polytheism, lived moral lives, and worshiped Christ as Divine.

⁴⁰ James Montgomery, *History and Christianity*, (Intervarsity Press, 1971), 29.

⁴¹ Zacharias, *CMLWG*, 162.

⁴² Montgomery, 31.

This picture confirms the view of Christ presented in the New Testament Gospels.⁴³

The question of the Canon of Scripture

From these statements by Christ to the Apostles, we “derive the basic principle of the canonicity for the New Testament. It is identical to that of the Old Testament, since it narrows down to a matter of divine inspiration. Whether we think of the prophets of Old Testament times or the apostles and their God-given associates of the New, the recognition at the very time of their writing that they were authentic spokesmen for God is what determines the intrinsic canonicity of their writing. It is altogether God’s Word only if it is God-breathed. We can be assured that the books under question were received by the church of the apostolic age precisely when they had been certified by an apostle as being thus inspired. The apparent variation, relative to geographic area, in acknowledgment of some of the New Testament epistles may well reflect the simple fact that this attestation was by its very nature localized at the first. Conversely, that all twenty-seven books of the now universally received New Testament were ultimately agreed upon is evidence that proper attestation was indeed confirmed after rigorous investigation.

Tertullian, an outstanding Christian writer in the first two decades of the third century, was one of the first to call the Christian Scriptures the ‘New Testament.’ That title had appeared earlier (c.190) in a composition against Montanism, the author of which is unknown. This is significant. Its use placed the New Testament Scripture on a level of inspiration and authority with the Old Testament.

From available information, the gradual process which led to full and formal public recognition of a fixed canon of the twenty-seven books comprising the New Testament takes us down into the fourth century of our era. This does not necessarily mean that these Scriptures were lacking recognition in their entirety before that time, but that a need for officially defining the canon was not pressing until then. Analogous to this would be the way certain theological doctrines have been enunciated at particular periods of church history, as – for example – the Christological formulations of early centuries of the church and the doctrine of justification by faith at the time of the Reformation. The fact that Tertullian is credited by some to be the first to define the Trinity clearly is not taken to mean that the doctrine of the triune God came into existence at that point in history or that the Bible did not contain that truth.

What factors were involved causing the collection of the New Testament Canonical Books?

1. They were recognized as “prophetic”
2. The churches needed to know which books were “God-breathed”

⁴³ Norm Geisler, *Big Book of Christian Apologetics*, (Baker Books, 2012), 384-385.

3. The rise of heretics (Marcion as early as A.D. 140 developed his own incomplete canon to justify his heresy)
4. The circulation of counterfeit books in the Eastern churches
5. Missions: Which books should be translated?
6. Persecution: The edict of Diocletian (A.D. 303) ordered the destruction of the sacred books of the Christians. For which books should a Christian be willing to die? The Church needed to know which books were truly “sacred” & needed protection through hiding.

“It is in the latter half of the fourth century, however, that the New Testament canon finds full and final declaration. In his Festal Letter for Easter, 367, Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria included information designed to eliminate once and for all the use of certain apocryphal books. This letter, with its admonition, ‘Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away,’ gives us the earliest extant document which specifies our twenty-seven books without qualification. At the close of the century the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397) decreed that ‘aside from the canonical Scriptures nothing is to be read in church under the Name of Divine Scriptures.’ This too lists the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.”⁴⁴

“By its very nature, Holy Scripture, whether Old or New Testament, is a production given of God, not the work of human creation. The key to canonicity is divine inspiration. Therefore, the method of determination is not one of selection from a number of possible candidate (there are no other candidates, in actuality) but one of reception of authentic material and its consequent recognition by an ever-widening circle as the facts of its origin become known...

Hence the early church, with closer ties and greater information than is available to us today, examined the testimony of the ancients. They were able to discern which were the authentic and authoritative books by their apostolic origin. Mark’s association with Peter and Luke’s with Paul gave them such apostolic approval, and epistles like Hebrews and Jude were also tied in with the apostolic message and ministry. Incontrovertible consistency of doctrine in all the books, including the sometime contested ones, was perhaps a subordinate test. But historically the procedure was essentially one of acceptance and approval of those books which were vouched for by knowledgeable church leaders. Full acceptance by the original recipients followed by a continued acknowledgment and use is an essential factor in the development of the canon.

The church’s concept of canon, derived first of all from the reverence given the Old Testament Scriptures, rested in the conviction that the apostles were uniquely authorized to speak in the name of the One who possessed all authority – the Lord Jesus Christ. The development from there is logical and straightforward. Those who heard Jesus in person were immediately subject to his authority. He personally authenticated his words to the

⁴⁴ Philip Comfort, editor, *The Origin of the Bible*, (Tyndale House Publishers: Carol Stream, Illinois, 2003), 74.

believers. These same believers knew that Jesus authorized his apostles to speak in his name, both during and (more significantly) after his earthly ministry. Apostolic speaking on behalf of Christ was recognized in the church, whether in personal utterance or in written form. Both the spoken word of an apostle and the letter of an apostle constituted the word of Christ.

The generation that followed that of the apostles themselves received the witness of those who knew that the apostles had the right to speak and write in the name of Christ. Consequently, the second and third generation of Christians looked back to apostolic words (writings) as the very words of Christ. This is what is really meant by canonization – recognition of the divinely authenticated word. Hence, the believers (the church) did not establish the canon by simply bore witness to its extent by recognizing the authority of the word of Christ.”⁴⁵

Examine the Biblical claim of exclusivity as the one & only God given religion

See handout “Does Christianity Differ From Other World Religions?” (Little, *Know Why You Believe*, ch 11)

⁴⁵ Comfort, 75-77.

The Philosophical Challenge of Evil & Suffering

The Existential Challenge of Evil ⁴⁶

It has been said that the First and Second World Wars changed humanity's attitude toward God and the world. To view the pictures of Hiroshima or the D-Day landing, with the horrific loss of life within hours, has a most sobering effect.

The 18th Century philosopher David Hume said, "Were a strange to drop suddenly into this world I would show him as a specimen of its ills, a hospital full of diseases, a prison crowded with malefactors and debtors, a field strewn with carcasses, a fleet floundering in the ocean, a nation languishing under tyranny, famine and pestilence. To turn the gay side of life to him, and give him a notion of its pleasures; whither should I conduct him? To a ball, to an opera, to court? He might justly think that I was only showing him a diversity of distress and sorrow."

But in contrast to Hume's attack upon the supernatural, ponder G. K. Chesterton's counterpoint when he suggested that when belief in God becomes difficult, the tendency is to turn away from him – but in heaven's name to what?

Bottom line: Ponder that when a skeptic raises the question of the problem of evil, he also smuggles in the Judeo-Christian worldview. For the very questions raised hint at the answer.

It is important to observe that the Bible does not run from this question. Scripture is not silent on the universal problem of evil and suffering.

Consider one of the oldest books of Scripture – Job. Here the Bible addresses this problem from a theistic framework.

Consider that Jeremiah challenged the Lord, saying, "I would speak to you about your justice; why does the way of the wicked prosper?" (Jer. 12:1)

Consider that Buddhism, as a world religion, owes its origin around the question of suffering.

The salient point here is that every worldview must give an explanation or an answer to the problem of evil.

Either evil categorically proves that God does not exist, as atheism asserts, or evil is not ultimately real, as pantheism claims, or evil is most coherently explained by the Scriptural view of God and His Sovereign purposes in creation.

⁴⁶ Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion*, from "Existential Challenges of Evil and Suffering"

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Ravi observes, “The atheist argues laboriously on the extent of the problem, and no worldview is more impoverished in its answers than the atheistic one. To quote a professor mine: ‘They are better at smelling rotten eggs than laying good ones!’”

So, from ancient history to this day, the problem of evil cuts across time, cultures and worldviews.

The problem of Evil entails three areas of focus: the physical, the metaphysical or philosophical and the moral.

It is interesting that, as we think of the physical Problem of Evil, we think of natural disasters and cataclysmic events; events typically called “acts of God.”

It is interesting that beautiful sunsets and other wonderful pleasures of life are given no such benevolent causation. In other words...

Malevolence is God’s doing. Benevolence is “evolutionary wisdom.”

Back to the question... “How can a good God allow evil?” Observe what is assumed in the question itself.

God has to be part of the paradigm or else the question self-destructs.

For if there is not God there is no absolute standard for questions of good & evil; right or wrong.

If there is no God there is no transcendent objective standard for determining the distinction between good & evil.

Indeed, the question of good & evil boils down to mere subjective opinion or preference.

Thus the very question & recognition of evil must have God in the paradigm; else it makes no sense.⁴⁷

Now, let us initially approach this question existentially...

Philosophy of Religion, Eleanor Stump; pgs. 414-417

Theodicy: “The defense of God’s goodness and omnipotence in the face of the existence of evil.”

⁴⁷ Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion*, 202-207.

Worldviews and evil

Although every worldview has to deal with the problem of evil, it is an especially acute problem for theism. Of the three major worldviews, atheism affirms the reality of evil and denies the reality of God.

Pantheism affirms the reality of God but denies the reality of evil. Only theism affirms the reality of both God and evil.

And here is the problem; how can an absolutely good Being (God) be compatible with evil?

The problem for theism is that it not only believes God is all-powerful and could destroy evil, but also that he is all-loving and should destroy it. Further, the theistic God is all-knowing and created this world fully aware of what would happen. What is more, God created the world freely, so that he could have done otherwise.

It is in the context of this kind of theistic view of God that we approach the problem of evil.

A sketch of Scriptural teaching

Scripture clearly teaches that God is not the author of evil. Consider the following passages:

In Habakkuk Chapter 1: "God is of purer eyes than to approve evil or behold evil. He cannot look on wickedness." Habakkuk 1:13. 1st Corinthians 14:33 says: "God is not the author of confusion." Confusion is a product of sin. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5) "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man." (James 1:13) "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, is not of the Father." (1 John 2:16) "You are not a God who has pleasure in wickedness; neither will evil dwell with You." (Psalm 5:4)

On a positive note, Isaiah 6 records the cry of the angels that God "Holy, holy, holy." MacArthur summarizes: "God is not the author of evil. If God created evil, then God would be both good and evil. And if God were both good and evil, there would be no hope for the ultimate triumph of good, which the Bible promises.

If God were the source of evil, he would have to be evil himself. And if He were evil himself, then there could be no basis for salvation, for God could not save us from evil if evil was in His nature.

So the Biblical revelation of the original goodness of creation protects the goodness of God. And it makes the source of evil outside of God. Only if the source of evil is outside of God can God conquer evil and can God save sinners from evil.

And just as a footnote to that; if God used any kind of evolution to create, evolution is dependent on decay and death, all effects or reflections of evil. So if God used any kind of evolution to create, then God authored evil; He created decay and He created death. And if God used any form of evolution, then His creation was not all good; it was not perfect when he created it, and it is what it is now because of decay and death, which He must have used in his creation, which are evidences of evil, then God must himself be evil. But God is not evil. God is all good and only good...

Let me put it to you simply: God is not responsible for evil. His creatures are. God is not responsible for evil. His creatures are.”⁴⁸

Augustine on Evil

The following is an article by Gregory Koukl, of Stand to Reason.⁴⁹“Augustine on Evil”

“Is God the author of evil or its helpless victim? St. Augustine's answer has been the most intellectually credible and emotionally satisfying solution to this vexing problem.

One doesn't need a Ph.D. in theology to look around the world and realize something is desperately wrong. The existence of evil is one of the most vexing challenges a Christian--or any person, for that matter-- must grapple with. It's occupied the minds of great

Christian thinkers since the beginning, including St. Augustine (354-430). For much of his life he worked hard at a solution. Augustine's approach was not just brilliant; it was practical. His insight is intellectually credible and emotionally satisfying in that it gives hope and offers meaning to the Christian trying to make sense out of life in a fallen world.

Two Aspects of the Problem

The problem of evil can be phrased in several ways.

One approach addresses the origin of evil, prompting the syllogism (a series of statements that form a reasoned argument):

(1st premise) God created all things

(2nd premise) Evil is a thing

Conclusion: Therefore, God created evil

If the first two premises are true, the conclusion is inescapable. This formulation, if sustained, is devastating for Christianity. God would not be good if He knowingly created evil.

⁴⁸ John MacArthur, *The Origin of Evil*, at <http://www.gty.org/resources/print/sermons/90-235>

⁴⁹ Greg Koukl, “Augustine of Evil”, article at <http://www.str.org/articles/augustine-on-evil#.U45lsvldWSo>

Augustine realized that the solution was tied to the question: What is evil? The argument above depends on the idea that evil is a thing (note the second premise). But what if evil is not a "thing" in that sense? Then evil did not need creating. If so, our search for the source of evil will take us in another direction.

Augustine approached the problem from a different angle. He asked: Do we have any convincing evidence that a good God exists? If independent evidence leads us to conclude that God exists and is good, then He would be incapable of creating evil. Something else, then, must be its source.

If Augustine's approach is fair, it prompts a pair of syllogisms that lead to a different conclusion.

First:

(1st premise) All things that God created are good
(2nd premise) Evil is not good
Conclusion: Therefore, evil was not created by God

Second:

(1st premise) God created every thing
(2nd premise) God did not create evil
Conclusion: Therefore, evil is not a thing

The key to success here, is the truthfulness of two premises. If Augustine can offer evidence through natural theology that God exists as Creator and also that God is good, making everything He created also good, then the conclusion--evil is not a thing--automatically follows.

This is Augustine's strategy. If evil is not a thing, then the case against Christianity stated in the original syllogism is unsound because one of its premises is false. The critical question is: What is evil?

Digging a Hole in Goodness

Central to Augustine's idea of goodness (and, consequently, evil) was the notion of "being". To Augustine, anything that had being was good. God as the ground of being was perfectly good, along with everything he brought into being. This goodness was a property that came in varying degrees.

With this foundation Augustine was now prepared to answer the key issue: "Where is evil then, and whence, and how crept it in hither? What is its root, and what its seed? Or hath it no being?"[i] To this Augustine answered: "Evil has no positive nature; but the loss of good has received the name 'evil.'"[ii]

Augustine observed that evil always injures, and such injury is a deprivation of good. If there were no deprivation, there would be no injury. Since all things were made with

goodness, evil must be the privation of goodness: "All which is corrupted is deprived of good." [iii]

The diminution of the property of goodness is what's called evil. Good has substantial being; evil does not. It is like a moral hole, a nothingness that results when goodness is removed. Just as a shadow is no more than a "hole" in light, evil is a hole in goodness. To say that something is evil, then, is a shorthand way of saying it either lacks goodness, or is a lower order of goodness than what ought to have been. But the question remains: "Whence and how crept it in hither?"

Augustine observed that evil could not be chosen because there is no evil thing to choose. One can only turn away from the good, that is from a greater good to a lesser good (in Augustine's hierarchy) since all things are good. "For when the will abandons what is above itself, and turns to what is lower, it becomes evil--not because that is evil to which it turns, but because the turning itself is wicked." [iv]

Evil, then, is the act itself of choosing the lesser good. To Augustine the source of evil is in the free will of persons: "And I strained to perceive what I now heard, that free-will was the cause of our doing ill." [v] Evil was a "perversion of the will, turned aside from...God" to lesser things. [vi]

Flawed Perfection

Augustine's solution has not been satisfying to some. Friedrich Schleiermacher snorted at the concept that God gave good creatures the freedom to do bad. If a being is perfect in its goodness, he held, it would never sin even if it were free to. Evil would then have to create itself ex nihilo, which is ridiculous. [vii]

However, it doesn't follow that moral perfection necessarily entails immutability. That's a different type of perfection, a perfection in being. Schleiermacher's objection confuses the two. The fact that a perfectly beautiful vase is capable of being broken doesn't take away from its aesthetic perfections. In the same way, it makes sense to say that man was created morally perfect (morally whole or complete, at his proper level of goodness), even though he wasn't immutable in this perfection.

The objections raised by atheist philosophers J.L. Mackie and Antony Flew are more substantial. [viii] Isn't it possible that God could have created man immutable in his goodness, yet still have the opportunity to freely choose in other areas? Won't man have immutable goodness in heaven? And will he not also have freedom to choose among certain options? Why not here on earth? Couldn't God construct man's nature such that evil simply was not an option?

Mackie and Flew are right in one regard. God could have created such a world. Freedom in the larger sense (the ability to make choices) does not require freedom in the narrow sense (the ability to make moral choices).

They miss the big picture, though: God would not have accomplished a second purpose. He not only wanted free creatures; He also wanted plenitude, that is, the greatest good possible. Plenitude--the highest good, the best of all possible worlds--requires more than just general freedom; it requires moral freedom, and that necessarily entails the possibility of evil.

Since all that God made is good, even those things which appear evil only appear that way because of a limited context or perspective. When viewed as a whole, that which appears to be evil ultimately contributes to the greater good.

For example, certain virtues couldn't exist without evil: courage, mercy, forgiveness, patience, the giving of comfort, heroism, perseverance, faithfulness, self-control, long-suffering, submission and obedience, to name a few. These are not virtues in the abstract, but elements of character that can only be had by moral souls. Just as evil is a result of acts of will, so is virtue. Acts of moral choice accomplish both.

The Best of All Worlds

A world that had never been touched by evil would be a good place, but it wouldn't be the best place possible. The best of all worlds would be a place where evil facilitated the development of virtues that are only able to exist where evil flourishes for a time. This would produce a world populated by souls that were refined by overcoming evil with good. The evil is momentary. The good that results is eternal.

What good comes out of a drive-by killing, someone might ask, or the death of a teenager through overdose, or a daughter's rape, or child abuse? The answer is that a commensurate good doesn't always come out of those individual situations, though God is certainly capable of redeeming any tragedy. Rather, the greater good results from having a world in which there is moral freedom, and moral freedom makes moral tragedies like these possible.

A Heavenly Twist

This observation reveals an interesting twist in this problem. If morality freely chosen can only happen in a world where evil is possible, then heaven will be a place where there will be no moral growth, where moral choices will not be possible because all the inhabitants of heaven will be immutably good. There is a type of soulful growth only available to inhabitants of a fallen world.

Two Scriptural observations lend credibility to this view. First, in recounting the great heroes of faith, the writer of Hebrews mentions that some were rescued by faith, but others endured by faith "...in order that they might obtain a better resurrection." [ix] (Heb. 11:35) Second, Paul tells Timothy that "...godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." (1 Tim. 4:8)

Both of these verses indicate that conditions in this life affect conditions in the next. Bearing up under evil in this life improves our resurrection in the next. Godliness in this life brings profit in the next. These benefits are not available after this life or there would be little urgency to grow now; all eternity would be left in which to catch up.

It appears that a deeper, more profound good results when virtue is won by free, moral souls struggling with evil, rather than simply granted to them as an element of their constitution.

Spoiled Goodness

Augustine knew that evil was real. Independent evidence (natural theology) was enough to convince him that God existed and that everything He created would be good. Evil, then, must be something real, but not a "thing" in the conventional sense. Evil is not a created thing, but spoiled goodness made possible by the free moral agency of rational creatures. Evil is not something present, but something missing, a privation.

The challenge that God could have created a world of free-will creatures immutable in their goodness is answered by the notion of plenitude, the greatest good. The possibility of evil also makes a greater good possible. God made a world in which true moral decision-making and development of virtues is possible in humans, manifest by persons whose character is formed through growth and struggle.

There's a sound reason why God has allowed evil. It doesn't conflict with His goodness. God is neither the author of evil, nor its helpless victim. Rather, precisely because of His goodness He chooses to co-exist with evil for a time.

[i] Augustine, Confessions, VII: [V] 7.

[ii] Augustine, The City of God, XI, CHAP. 9.

[iii] Augustine, Confessions, VII: [XII] 18.

[iv] Augustine, City of God, XII, CHAP. 6.

[v] Augustine, Confessions VII: [III] 5.

[vi] Ibid., [XVI] 22.

[vii] Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 3, 138.

[viii] See J.L. Mackie, "God and Omnipotence," Mind, April 1955, and Antony Flew, "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom," New Essays in Philosophical Theology, 1955 (referenced in Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 3, 138).

[ix] Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ See also Koukl's article titled "A Good Reason for Evil" at <http://www.str.org/articles/a-good-reason-for-evil#.UhqrwZLVCS0>

Finally, what does Scripture say? For Scripture is not silent on why God has allowed evil...

(1st) God allowed evil in order to display the riches of His glory on vessels of mercy prepared for glory

*“You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of **his glory for vessels of mercy**, which he has prepared beforehand for glory...” (Romans 9:19-23)*

(2nd) God allowed evil in order to show his wrath & power on vessels of wrath prepared for destruction

*“You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience **vessels of wrath prepared for destruction**, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory...” (Romans 9:19-23)*

(3rd) God allows evil & suffering to draw sinners back to Himself

Psalms 119:67-75; Hebrews 12:5ff & 2 Corinthians 12

“Pain is God’s megaphone to a deaf world” – C.S. Lewis

“Suffering is the sharp toothed sheepdog that keeps us in the fold” – George McDonald

(4th) God allowed evil for His Glory in order to destroy sin & death forever.

“For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.” 1 Cor 15: 25, 26

Again, speaking of Christ Jesus says, *“that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil.” Heb 2:14*

“For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Rom 8:20, 21

“And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.” Revel 20:14

“And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” Revel 21:3, 4

(4th) God allowed evil for His Glory that He might gain the greatest good – plenitude

As morally free & responsible persons develop the softer virtues of His Divine nature as they live out their lives struggling in a fallen world.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:4-7)

In conclusion ponder the mystery of Romans 11... “For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:32-36)

ADDENDUM

WHY PHILOSOPHY MATTERS

From the essay, "An Invitation to Christian Philosophy"

"On a clear autumn day in 1980, twenty-five miles west of Chicago, in Wheaton, Illinois, Charles Malik, a distinguished academic and statesman, rose to the podium to deliver the inaugural address at the dedication of the new Billy Graham Center on the campus of Wheaton College. His announced topic was "The Two Tasks of Evangelism." What he said must have shocked his audience.

We face two tasks in our evangelism, he told them, "saving the soul and saving the mind"--that is, converting people not only spiritually but intellectually as well--and the church, he warned, is lagging dangerously behind with respect to this second task. We should do well to ponder Malik's words:

I must be frank with you: the greatest danger confronting American evangelical Christianity is the danger of anti-intellectualism. The mind in its greatest and deepest reaches is not cared for enough. But intellectual nurture cannot take place apart from profound immersion for a period of years in the history of thought and the spirit. People who are in a hurry to get out of the university and start earning money or serving the church or preaching the gospel have no idea of the infinite value of spending years of leisure conversing with the greatest minds and souls of the past, ripening and sharpening and enlarging their powers of thinking. The result is that the arena of creative thinking is vacated and abdicated to the enemy. Who among evangelicals can stand up to the great secular scholars on their own terms of scholarship? Who among evangelical scholars is quoted as a normative source by the greatest secular authorities on history or philosophy or psychology or sociology or politics? Does the evangelical mode of thinking have the slightest chance of becoming the dominant mode in the great universities of Europe and America that stamp our entire civilization with their spirit and ideas? For the sake of greater effectiveness in witnessing to Jesus Christ, as well as for their own sakes, evangelicals cannot afford to keep on living on the periphery of responsible intellectual existence.¹

These words hit like a hammer. The average Christian does not realize that there is an intellectual struggle going on in the universities and scholarly journals and professional societies. Enlightenment naturalism and postmodern antirealism are arrayed in an unholy alliance against a broadly theistic and specifically Christian worldview.

Christians cannot afford to be indifferent to the outcome of this struggle. For the single most important institution shaping Western culture is the university. It is at the university that our future political leaders, our journalists, our teachers, our business executives, our lawyers, our artists, will be trained. It is at the university that they will formulate or, more likely, simply absorb the worldview that will shape their lives. And since these are the opinion-makers and leaders who shape our culture, the worldview that they imbibe at the

university will be the one that shapes our culture. If the Christian worldview can be restored to a place of prominence and respect at the university, it will have a leavening effect throughout society. If we change the university, we change our culture through those who shape culture.

Why is this important? Simply because the gospel is never heard in isolation. It is always heard against the background of the cultural milieu in which one lives. A person raised in a cultural milieu in which Christianity is still seen as an intellectually viable option will display an openness to the gospel that a person who is secularized will not. One may as well tell a secular person to believe in fairies or leprechauns as in Jesus Christ! Or, to give a more realistic illustration, it is like our being approached in the street by a devotee of the Hare Krishna movement, who invites us to believe in Krishna. Such an invitation strikes us as bizarre, freakish, perhaps even amusing. But to a person on the streets of Bombay, such an invitation would, one expects, appear quite reasonable and be a serious cause for reflection. Do evangelicals appear any less weird to persons on the streets of Bonn, London or New York than do the devotees of Krishna?

One of the awesome tasks of Christian philosophers is to help turn the contemporary intellectual tide in such a way as to foster a sociocultural milieu in which Christian faith can be regarded as an intellectually credible option for thinking men and women. As the great Princeton theologian J. Gresham Machen explained, "God usually exerts [his regenerative] power with certain prior conditions of the human mind, and it should be ours to create, so far as we can, with the help of God, those favourable conditions for the reception of the gospel. False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervour of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion." 2

Since philosophy is foundational to every discipline of the university, philosophy is the most strategic discipline to be influenced for Christ. Malik himself realized and emphasized this:

It will take a different spirit altogether to overcome this great danger of anti-intellectualism. For example, I say this different spirit, so far as philosophy alone--the most important domain for thought and intellect--is concerned, must see the tremendous value of spending an entire year doing nothing but poring intensely over the Republic or the Sophist of Plato, or two years over the Metaphysics or the Ethics of Aristotle, or three years over the City of God of Augustine.3

Now in once sense it is theology, not philosophy, which is the most important domain for thought and intellect. As the medievals rightly saw, theology is the queen of the sciences, to be studied as the crowning discipline only after one has been trained in the other disciplines. Unfortunately, the queen is currently in exile from the Western university. But her handmaid, philosophy, still has a place at court and is thus strategically positioned so as to act on behalf of her queen. The reason that Malik could call philosophy, in the absence of the queen, the most important intellectual domain is

because it is the most foundational of all the disciplines, since it examines the presuppositions and ramifications of every discipline at the university--including itself! Whether it be philosophy of science, philosophy of education, philosophy of law, philosophy of mathematics, or what have you, every discipline will have an associated field of philosophy foundational to that discipline. The philosophy of these respective disciplines is not theologically neutral. Adoption of presuppositions consonant with or inimical to orthodox Christian theism will have a significant leavening effect throughout that discipline which will, in turn, dispose its practitioners for or against the Christian faith. Christian philosophers, by influencing the philosophy of these various disciplines, can thus help to shape the thinking of the entire university in such a way as to dispose our future generations of leaders to the reception of the gospel.

It is already happening. Over the last forty years a revolution has been occurring in Anglo-American philosophy. Since the late 1960s Christian philosophers have been coming out of the closet and defending the truth of the Christian worldview with philosophically sophisticated arguments in the finest scholarly journals and professional societies. And the face of Anglo-American philosophy has been transformed as a result. In a recent article lamenting "the desecularization of academia that evolved in philosophy departments since the late 1960s," one atheist philosopher observes that whereas theists in other disciplines tend to compartmentalize their theistic beliefs from professional work, "in philosophy, it became, almost overnight, 'academically respectable' to argue for theism, making philosophy a favored field of entry for the most intelligent and talented theists entering academia today."⁴ He complains, "Naturalists passively watched as realist versions of theism...began to sweep through the philosophical community, until today perhaps one-quarter or one-third of philosophy professors are theists, with most being orthodox Christians."⁵ He concludes, "God is not 'dead' in academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments."⁶

This is the testimony of a prominent atheist philosopher to the change that has transpired before his eyes in Anglo-American philosophy. He is probably exaggerating when he estimates that one-quarter to one-third of American philosophers are theists; but what his estimates do reveal is the perceived impact of Christian philosophers on this field. Like Gideon's army, a committed minority of activists can have an impact far out of proportion to their numbers. The principal error he makes is calling philosophy departments God's "last stronghold" at the university. On the contrary, philosophy departments are a beachhead, from which operations can be launched to impact other disciplines at the university for Christ, thereby helping to transform the socio-cultural milieu in which we live.

But it is not just those who plan to enter the academy professionally who need to have training in philosophy. Christian philosophy is also an integral part of training for Christian ministry. A model for us here is a man like John Wesley, who was at once a Spirit-filled revivalist and an Oxford-educated scholar. In 1756 Wesley delivered "An Address to the Clergy," which we commend to all future ministers when commencing their seminary studies. In discussing what sort of abilities a minister ought to have,

Wesley distinguished between natural gifts and acquired abilities. And it is extremely instructive to look at the abilities that Wesley thought a minister ought to acquire. One of them is a basic grasp of philosophy. He challenged his audience to ask themselves, Am I a tolerable master of the sciences? Have I gone through the very gate of them, logic? If not, I am not likely to go much farther when I stumble at the threshold... Rather, have not my stupid indolence and laziness made me very ready to believe, what the little wits and pretty gentlemen affirm, that "logic is good for nothing?" It is good for this at least,... to make people talk less; by showing them both what is, and what is not, to the point; and how extremely hard it is to prove any thing. Do I understand metaphysics; if not the depths of the Schoolmen, the subtleties of Scotus or Aquinas, yet the first rudiments, the general principles, of that useful science? Have I conquered so much of it, as to clear my apprehension and range my ideas under proper heads; so much as enables me to read with ease and pleasure, as well as profit, Dr. Henry Moore's Works, Malbranche's "Search after Truth," and Dr. Clarke's "Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God?"⁷

Wesley's vision of a pastor is remarkable: a gentleman, skilled in the Scriptures and conversant with history, philosophy and the science of his day. How do the pastors graduating from our seminaries compare to this model?

The authors of this book can both testify personally to the immense practicality and even indispensability of philosophical training for Christian ministry. For many years we have each been involved, not just in scholarly work but in speaking evangelistically on university campuses with groups like InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade for Christ and the Veritas Forum. Again and again, we have seen the practical value of philosophical studies in reaching students for Christ. From questions dealing with the meaning of life or the basis of moral values to the problem of suffering and evil and the challenge of religious pluralism, students are asking profound philosophical questions that are much more difficult to answer than to pose. They deserve a thoughtful response rather than pat answers or appeals to ministry. The conventional wisdom says, "You can't use arguments to bring people to Christ." This has not been our experience. The fact is that there is a tremendous interest among unbelieving students in hearing a rational presentation and defense of the gospel, and some will be ready to respond with trust in Christ. To speak frankly, we do not know how one could minister more effectively in a public way on our university campuses without training in philosophy.

Finally, it is not just scholars and ministers who will benefit from training in philosophy, but also laypeople who need to be intellectually engaged if our culture is to be effectively reformed. Our churches are unfortunately overly-populated with people whose minds, as Christians, are going to waste. As Malik observed, they may be spiritually regenerate, but their minds have not been converted; they still think like nonbelievers. Despite their Christian commitment, they remain largely empty selves. What is an empty self? An empty self is a person who is passive, sensate, busy and hurried, incapable of developing an interior life. Such a person is inordinately individualistic, infantile and narcissistic.

Imagine now a church filled with such people. What will be the theological understanding, the evangelistic courage, the cultural penetration of such a church? If the interior life does not really matter all that much, why should one spend the time trying to develop an intellectual, spiritually mature life? If someone is basically passive, he will just not make the effort to read, preferring instead to be entertained. If a person is sensate in orientation, then music, magazines filled with pictures, and visual media in general will be more important than mere words on a page or abstract thoughts. If one is hurried and distracted, one will have little patience for theoretical knowledge and too short an attention span to stay with an idea while it is being carefully developed. And if someone is overly individualistic, infantile and narcissistic, what will that person read, if he reads at all? Books about Christian celebrities, Christian romance novels imitating the worst that the world has to offer, Christian self-help books filled with slogans, simplistic moralizing, lots of stories and pictures, and inadequate diagnoses of the problems facing the reader. What will not be read are books that equip people to develop a well-reasoned, theological understanding of the Christian faith and to assume their role in the broader work of the kingdom of God. Such a church will become impotent to stand against the powerful forces of secularism that threaten to wash away Christian ideas in a flood of thoughtless pluralism and misguided scientism. Such a church will be tempted to measure her success largely in terms of numbers--numbers achieved by cultural accommodation to empty selves. In this way, the church will become her own grave digger; for her means of short-term "success" will turn out in the long run to be the very thing that buries her.

What makes this envisioned scenario so distressing is that we do not have to imagine such a church; rather this is an apt description of far too many American evangelical churches today. It is no wonder, then, that despite its resurgence, evangelical Christianity has been thus far limited in its cultural impact. David Wells reflects, "The vast growth in evangelically minded people...should by now have revolutionized American culture. With a third of American adults now claiming to have experienced spiritual rebirth, a powerful countercurrent of morality growing out of a powerful and alternative worldview should have been unleashed in factories, offices, and board rooms, in the media, universities, and professions, from one end of the country to the other. The results should now be unmistakable. Secular values should be reeling, and those who are their proponents should be very troubled. But as it turns out, all of this swelling of the evangelical ranks has passed unnoticed in the culture...The presence of evangelicals in American culture has barely caused a ripple." 8

The problem, says Wells, is that while evangelicals have for the most part correct Christian beliefs, for far too many these beliefs lie largely at the periphery of their existence rather than at the center of their identity. At core they are hollow men, empty selves. If we as the church are to engender a current of reform throughout our culture, then we need laypeople who are intellectually engaged with their faith and take their Christian identity to be definitive for their self-conception.

Besides cultural reform, a revival of intellectual engagement is absolutely critical for restoring vibrant, life-transforming apprenticeship under the lordship of Jesus, the Master Teacher. No apprentice will become like his teacher if he does not respect the authority of

that teacher to direct the apprentice's life and activities. However, today the authority of the Bible in general, and of Jesus Christ in particular, is widely disregarded. The general attitude, even among many of Christ's own followers, is that while Jesus Christ is holy, powerful and so forth, the worldview he taught and from which he lived is no longer credible for thinking people. As Dallas Willard observes, "The crushing weight of the secular outlook...permeates or pressures every thought we have today. Sometimes it even forces those who self-identify as Christian teachers to set aside Jesus' plain statements about the reality and total relevance of the kingdom of God and replace them with philosophical speculations whose only recommendation is their consistency with a "modern" [i.e., contemporary] mindset. The powerful though vague and unsubstantiated presumption is that something has been found out that renders a spiritual understanding of reality in the manner of Jesus simply foolish to those who are "in the know." 9

Willard concludes that in order to restore spiritual vitality to the church, we must recapture a view of Jesus as an intellectually competent person who knew what he was talking about.

For Willard, who is himself a philosopher, this will include revitalizing philosophical reflection in the church. Philosophical reflection is, indeed, a powerful means of kindling the life of the mind in Christian discipleship and in the church. Again, the authors of this book can testify that our worship of God is deeper precisely because of, not in spite of, our philosophical studies. As we reflect philosophically on our various areas of specialization within the field of philosophy, our appreciation of God's truth and awe of his person have become more profound. We look forward to future study because of the deeper appreciation we are sure it will bring of God's person and work. Christian faith is not an apathetic faith, a brain-dead faith, but a living, inquiring faith. As Anselm puts it, ours is a faith that seeks understanding.

These are very exciting times in which to be alive and working in the field of philosophy, where God is doing fresh work before our eyes. It is our hope and prayer that he will be pleased to use this book to call even more Christian thinkers to this effervescing field and to equip the church and her ministers to serve him and his kingdom even more effectively into the twenty-first century."

Footnotes

(1) Charles Malik, "The Other Side of Evangelism," *ChristianityToday*, November 7, 1980, p. 40. For the original address, see *The Two Tasks* (Wheaton, Ill.: Billy Graham Center, 2000).

(2) Address delivered on September 20, 1912, at the opening of the 101st session of Princeton Theological Seminary. Reprinted in *J. Gresham Machen, What Is Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 162.

(3) Malik, "Other Side of Evangelism," p. 40.

(4) Quentin Smith, "The Metaphysics of Naturalism," *Philo* 4, no. 2 (2001): 3.

(5) Ibid.

(6) Ibid., p. 4.

(7) "An Address to the Clergy," delivered February 6, 1756. Reprinted in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3d ed., 7 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker, 1996), 6:217-31.

(8) David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 293.

(9) Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), p. 92. Cf. pp. 75, 79, 134, 184-85.

Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*

CHAPTER I

APPEARANCE AND REALITY

IS there any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it? This question, which at first sight might not seem difficult, is really one of the most difficult that can be asked. When we have realized the obstacles in the way of a straightforward and confident answer, we shall be well launched on the study of philosophy -- for philosophy is merely the attempt to answer such ultimate questions, not carelessly and dogmatically, as we do in ordinary life and even in the sciences, but critically after exploring all that makes such questions puzzling, and after realizing all the vagueness and confusion that underlie our ordinary ideas.

In daily life, we assume as certain many things which, on a closer scrutiny, are found to be so full of apparent contradictions that only a great amount of thought enables us to know what it is that we really may believe. In the search for certainty, it is natural to begin with our present experiences, and in some sense, no doubt, knowledge is to be derived from them. But any statement as to what it is that our immediate experiences make us know is very likely to be wrong. It seems to me that I am now sitting in a chair, at a table of a certain shape, on which I see sheets of paper with writing or print. By turning my head I see out of the window buildings and clouds and the sun. I believe that the sun is about ninety-three million miles from the earth; that it is a hot globe many times bigger than the earth; that, owing to the earth's rotation, it rises every morning, and will continue to do so for an indefinite time in the future. I believe that, if any other normal person comes into my room, he will see the same chairs and tables and books and papers as I see, and that the table which I see is the same as the table which I feel pressing against my arm. All this seems to be so evident as to be hardly worth stating, except in answer to a man who doubts whether I know anything. Yet all this may be reasonably doubted, and all of it requires much careful discussion before we can be sure that we have stated it in a form that is wholly true.

To make our difficulties plain, let us concentrate attention on the table. To the eye it is oblong, brown and shiny, to the touch it is smooth and cool and hard; when I tap it, it gives out a wooden sound. Any one else who sees and feels and hears the table will agree with this description, so that it might seem as if no difficulty would arise; but as soon as we try to be more precise our troubles begin. Although I believe that the table is 'really' of the same colour all over, the parts that reflect the light look much brighter than the other parts, and some parts look white because of reflected light. I know that, if I move, the parts that reflect the light will be different, so that the apparent distribution of colours on the table will change. It follows that if several people are looking at the table at the same moment, no two of them will see exactly the same distribution of colours, because no two can see it from exactly the same point of view, and any change in the point of view makes some change in the way the light is reflected.

For most practical purposes these differences are unimportant, but to the painter they are all-important: the painter has to unlearn the habit of thinking that things seem to have the colour which common sense says they 'really' have, and to learn the habit of seeing things as they appear. Here we have already the beginning of one of the distinctions that cause most trouble in philosophy -- the distinction between 'appearance' and 'reality', between what things seem to be and what they are. The painter wants to know what things seem to be, the practical man and the philosopher want to know what they are; but the philosopher's wish to know this is stronger than the practical man's, and is more troubled by knowledge as to the difficulties of answering the question.

To return to the table. It is evident from what we have found, that there is no colour which preeminently appears to be *the* colour of the table, or even of any one particular part of the table -- it appears to be of different colours from different points of view, and there is no reason for regarding some of these as more really its colour than others. And we know that even from a given point of view the colour will seem different by artificial light, or to a colour-blind man, or to a man wearing blue spectacles, while in the dark there will be no colour at all, though to touch and hearing the table will be unchanged. This colour is not something which is inherent in the table, but something depending upon the table and the spectator and the way the light falls on the table. When, in ordinary life, we speak of *the* colour of the table, we only mean the sort of colour which it will seem to have to a normal spectator from an ordinary point of view under usual conditions of light. But the other colours which appear under other conditions have just as good a right to be considered real; and therefore, to avoid favouritism, we are compelled to deny that, in itself, the table has any one particular colour.

The same thing applies to the texture. With the naked eye one can see the grain, but otherwise the table looks smooth and even. If we looked at it through a microscope, we should see roughnesses and hills and valleys, and all sorts of differences that are imperceptible to the naked eye. Which of these is the 'real' table? We are naturally tempted to say that what we see through the microscope is more real, but that in turn would be changed by a still more powerful microscope. If, then, we cannot trust what we see with the naked eye, why should we trust what we see through a microscope? Thus, again, the confidence in our senses with which we began deserts us.

The *shape* of the table is no better. We are all in the habit of judging as to the 'real' shapes of things, and we do this so unreflectingly that we come to think we actually see the real shapes. But, in fact, as we all have to learn if we try to draw, a given thing looks different in shape from every different point of view. If our table is 'really' rectangular, it will look, from almost all points of view, as if it had two acute angles and two obtuse angles. If opposite sides are parallel, they will look as if they converged to a point away from the spectator; if they are of equal length, they will look as if the nearer side were longer. All these things are not commonly noticed in looking at a table, because experience has taught us to construct the 'real' shape from the apparent shape, and the 'real' shape is what interests us as practical men. But the 'real' shape is not what we see; it is something inferred from what we see. And what we see is constantly changing in shape as we, move

about the room; so that here again the senses seem not to give us the truth about the table itself, but only about the appearance of the table.

Similar difficulties arise when we consider the sense of touch. It is true that the table always gives us a sensation of hardness, and we feel that it resists pressure. But the sensation we obtain depends upon how hard we press the table and also upon what part of the body we press with; thus the various sensations due to various pressures or various parts of the body cannot be supposed to reveal *directly* any definite property of the table, but at most to be signs of some property which perhaps *causes* all the sensations, but is not actually apparent in any of them. And the same applies still more obviously to the sounds which can be elicited by rapping the table.

Thus it becomes evident that the real table, if there is one, is not the same as what we immediately experience by sight or touch or hearing. The real table, if there is one, is not *immediately* known to us at all, but must be an inference from what is immediately known. Hence, two very difficult questions at once arise; namely, (1) Is there a real table at all? (2) If so, what sort of object can it be?

It will help us in considering these questions to have a few simple terms of which the meaning is definite and clear. Let us give the name of 'sense-data' to the things that are immediately known in sensation: such things as colours, sounds, smells, hardnesses, roughnesses, and so on. We shall give the name 'sensation' to the experience of being immediately aware of these things. Thus, whenever we see a colour, we have a sensation *of* the colour, but the colour itself is a sense-datum, not a sensation. The colour is that *of* which we are immediately aware, and the awareness itself is the sensation. It is plain that if we are to know anything about the table, it must be by means of the sense-data -- brown colour, oblong shape, smoothness, etc. -- which we associate with the table; but, for the reasons which have been given, we cannot say that the table is the sense-data, or even that the sense-data are directly properties of the table. Thus a problem arises as to the relation of the sense-data to the real table, supposing there is such a thing.

The real table, if it exists, we will call a 'physical object'. Thus we have to consider the relation of sense-data to physical objects. The collection of all physical objects is called 'matter'. Thus our two questions may be re-stated as follows: (1) Is there any such thing as matter? (2) If so, what is its nature?

The philosopher who first brought prominently forward the reasons for regarding the immediate objects of our senses as not existing independently of us was Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753). His *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, in Opposition to Sceptics and Atheists*, undertake to prove that there is no such thing as matter at all, and that the world consists of nothing but minds and their ideas. Hylas has hitherto believed in matter, but he is no match for Philonous, who mercilessly drives him into contradictions and paradoxes, and makes his own denial of matter seem, in the end, as if it were almost common sense. The arguments employed are of very different value: some are important and sound, others are confused or quibbling. But Berkeley retains the merit of having shown that the existence of matter is capable of being denied without absurdity,

and that if there are any things that exist independently of us they cannot be the immediate objects of our sensations.

There are two different questions involved when we ask whether matter exists, and it is important to keep them clear. We commonly mean by 'matter' something which is opposed to 'mind', something which we think of as occupying space and as radically incapable of any sort of thought or consciousness. It is chiefly in this sense that Berkeley denies matter; that is to say, he does not deny that the sense-data which we commonly take as signs of the existence of the table are really signs of the existence of *something* independent of us, but he does deny that this something is nonmental, that it is neither mind nor ideas entertained by some mind. He admits that there must be something which continues to exist when we go out of the room or shut our eyes, and that what we call seeing the table does really give us reason for believing in something which persists even when we are not seeing it. But he thinks that this something cannot be radically different in nature from what we see, and cannot be independent of seeing altogether, though it must be independent of *our* seeing. He is thus led to regard the 'real' table as an idea in the mind of God. Such an idea has the required permanence and independence of ourselves, without being -- as matter would otherwise be -- something quite unknowable, in the sense that we can only infer it, and can never be directly and immediately aware of it.

Other philosophers since Berkeley have also held that, although the table does not depend for its existence upon being seen by me, it does depend upon being seen (or otherwise apprehended in sensation) by *some* mind -- not necessarily the mind of God, but more often the whole collective mind of the universe. This they hold, as Berkeley does, chiefly because they think there can be nothing real -- or at any rate nothing known to be real except minds and their thoughts and feelings. We might state the argument by which they support their view in some such way as this: 'Whatever can be thought of is an idea in the mind of the person thinking of it; therefore nothing can be thought of except ideas in minds; therefore anything else is inconceivable, and what is inconceivable cannot exist.'

Such an argument, in my opinion, is fallacious; and of course those who advance it do not put it so shortly or so crudely. But whether valid or not, the argument has been very widely advanced in one form or another; and very many philosophers, perhaps a majority, have held that there is nothing real except minds and their ideas. Such philosophers are called 'idealists'. When they come to explaining matter, they either say, like Berkeley, that matter is really nothing but a collection of ideas, or they say, like Leibniz (1646-1716), that what appears as matter is really a collection of more or less rudimentary minds.

But these philosophers, though they deny matter as opposed to mind, nevertheless, in another sense, admit matter. It will be remembered that we asked two questions; namely, (1) Is there a real table at all? (2) If so, what sort of object can it be? Now both Berkeley and Leibniz admit that there is a real table, but Berkeley says it is certain ideas in the mind of God, and Leibniz says it is a colony of souls. Thus both of them answer our first question in the affirmative, and only diverge from the views of ordinary mortals in their

answer to our second question. In fact, almost all philosophers seem to be agreed that there is a real table. they almost all agree that, however much our sense-data -- colour, shape, smoothness, etc. -- may depend upon us, yet their occurrence is a sign of something existing independently of us, something differing, perhaps, completely from our sense-data whenever we are in a suitable relation to the real table.

Now obviously this point in which the philosophers are agreed -- the view that there is a real table, whatever its nature may be is vitally important, and it will be worth while to consider what reasons there are for accepting this view before we go on to the further question as to the nature of the real table. Our next chapter, therefore, will be concerned with the reasons for supposing that there is a real table at all.

Before we go farther it will be well to consider for a moment what it is that we have discovered so far. It has appeared that, if we take any common object of the sort that is supposed to be known by the senses, what the senses *immediately* tell us is not the truth about the object as it is apart from us, but only the truth about certain sense-data which, so far as we can see, depend upon the relations between us and the object. Thus what we directly see and feel is merely 'appearance', which we believe to be a sign of some 'reality' behind. But if the reality is not what appears, have we any means of knowing whether there is any reality at all? And if so, have we any means of finding out what it is like?

Such questions are bewildering, and it is difficult to know that even the strangest hypotheses may not be true. Thus our familiar table, which has roused but the slightest thoughts in us hitherto, has become a problem full of surprising possibilities. The one thing we know about it is that it is not what it seems. Beyond this modest result, so far, we have the most complete liberty of conjecture. Leibniz tells us it is a community of souls: Berkeley tells us it is an idea in the mind of God; sober science, scarcely less wonderful, tells us it is a vast collection of electric charges in violent motion.

Among these surprising possibilities, doubt suggests that perhaps there is no table at all. Philosophy, if it cannot answer so many questions as we could wish, has at least the power of asking questions which increase the interest of the world, and show the strangeness and wonder lying just below the surface even in the commonest things of daily life.

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