

Antitheism Presupposes Theism

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[This article was adapted from a series of [blog posts](#) by Dr. Henebury.]

I have recently been posting a series of basic studies for Christian parents at the [TELOS site](#) entitled [Apologetics and Your Children](#). The posts are meant to encourage believers to take the matter of Truth seriously, and to use Apologetics as a framework in which to fit their evangelism and education of their kids.

A few weeks ago on the Telos Ministries Facebook page an atheist whom I shall call FF showed up with a challenge to the presuppositional apologetics (PA) I employ. This apologetic method uses a transcendental critique of opposing positions; what Cornelius Van Til referred to as non-Christian philosophies of life. Van Til wrote:

A truly transcendental argument takes any fact of experience which it wishes to investigate, and tries to determine what the presuppositions of such a fact must be, in order to make it what it is...

It is the firm conviction of every epistemologically self-conscious Christian that no human being can utter a single syllable, whether in negation or in affirmation, unless it were for God's existence. Thus the transcendental argument seeks to discover what sort of foundations the house of human knowledge must have, in order to be what it is.¹

Thus, Van Til's presuppositional apologetic is an all-or-nothing approach. As he says on the next page:

It thus appears that we must take the Bible, its conception of sin, its conception of Christ, and its conception of God and all that is involved in these concepts together, or take none of them. So also it makes very little difference whether we begin with the notion of an absolute God or with the notion of an absolute Bible. The one is derived from the other. They are together involved in the Christian view of life. Hence we defend all or we defend none.²

I belabor the point because PA is so often misrepresented and hence its thrust is bypassed. As we shall see, FF has not grasped the argument. (*As I argue against him I want to be respectful of him as a person. I want FF to be saved by Christ and turn from his nihilistic point of view. I am not in this to just win an argument. Any seeming disrespect is certainly not intentional*).

The assertion of PA is not that unbelievers do not know things. It is that they are unable to account for what they know using their unbelieving outlooks. And if they cannot account for their arguments from within their own outlook, they should give it up and find one that does account for it. And Christian presuppositionalists claim that the only outlook or worldview

1 Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 10, 11.

2 Ibid, 12

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which accounts for facts, values, logic, justice, beauty, etc. is the Christian worldview of the Bible.

Neutrality – Really?

The premise of neutrality is that a person believes that they have adopted a view of the world (metaphysics), and a view of how to know the world (epistemology), which is normative, and that any diversions from that “normative perspective” are wrong because they disagree with that perspective. The only outlook which does not need to give an account of itself is (conveniently) their own – because they are, of course, neutral.

Quite apart from the Christian perspective which I am coming from, such a view is quite obviously question-begging – as the history of philosophy abundantly proves. Atheists are not immune from bias, as any cursory reading of their work shows. The fact that most of them still hold to a form of logical positivism and hitch it up to philosophical naturalism seems more apparent to their detractors oftentimes than it does to them. How often, e.g. do we hear atheist evolutionists say they do not consider any other definition of science than naturalism “good science”? It does not matter to these people that the founders of science did not hold such a definition, and would therefore not be considered scientists if these people were right. The patent absurdity of saying Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Boyle, Pascal, Kelvin, Faraday, Maxwell etc. were not scientists because they were supernaturalists ought to silence such men. What is their real problem? It is clear enough. They hate God. So they define science their way (eliminating the luminaries above in the process) and then they can control the field. But science should not be defined by a philosophical agenda. Science should simply be a search for the Truth in the world amenable to scientific inquiry. That ought to be the definition. Just how the truth is to be known will depend on a person’s worldview. For the founders of modern science, the fact that God created the universe and gave us the ability to discover things in it gave them the intellectual mandate to do science (i.e. explore the world and discover truth). But naturalists discount this view. We must demand of them then that they give an adequate account of the possibility of science and the amenability of truth. We must ask them to give us the foundational tenets of their worldview. This is given merely to illustrate the naivete of believing one is neutral. No one is neutral.

From a Christian perspective of course, atheists are anti-theists (“Theist” here denoting a Christian-trinitarian theist). They have already decided that God does not exist; not because they have proved He doesn’t – but because they would prefer it if He didn’t. Now FF is a case in point. He thinks he is purely objective, and using that objectivity he ignores Christian scholarship and reads his atheists. By so doing he issues challenges to Christians, even though he misrepresents what they believe, gets their apologetic argument wrong, and asserts things about the naming of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark which he is unable to prove. He

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claims the presuppositional argument is “just plain fallacious” but when asked to describe it, comes up with this:

Easiest example is the TAG argument. Taken to it's bare minimum, it essentially goes as follows:

Reality/existence has a fundamental nature, therefore God exists.

Does that sound anything remotely like Van Til's argument above? I certainly wouldn't want to be lumbered with defending that, so I shall have to disappoint FF and use the proper argument. That argument is that the Christian-biblical God must be presupposed for us to give a rational account of facts.

I know this may sound strange to some readers, but it must be remembered that God is the Creator and He has stamped the marks of His existence in His world, and has given to us a verbal revelation to instruct us in our interpretation of it.

Quite obviously, this claim will not be accepted by those who remain outside of Christ, and I do not expect FF to accept it. But when atheists like him are pressed to give a reason for their use of logic, values, science, and the like from their own unbelieving world and life philosophy, they cannot. They simply evade these most basic of questions. But again, if a person can't account for the facts of reality he employs from his espoused worldview, he must be asked to change to a worldview which can account for them. That worldview, I have asserted, is the Christian one. In fact, the Christian worldview even accounts for why unbelievers prefer incoherent worldviews rather than bowing their knees to Christ.

FF says I am biased and he is right. I am a Christian who believes the Bible, and who has been saved by God's grace through faith in the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. I have a bias, and I am prepared to defend it. Being biased in the direction of the truth is both right and rational. FF rejects my bias. I only wish he would recognize his own and stop treating it as normative. If it is normative then his “unbiased” position will land us all in the soup sooner rather than later!

Two examples: If I have a bias towards my wife as a special woman apart from all other women, that is a good bias (although I do realize some like R. Dawkins will not necessarily agree). If I was biased against the Nazi extermination of Jews, gypsies and handicapped, I would think most would believe my bias was both right and rational – and a bias the other way irrational and evil. In the same way my bias for the God of Scripture is, I believe, both proper and rational. FF of course, is free to disagree. But it would be very naive of him to keep asserting his lack of all bias. Indeed he has already shown a bias in favor of atheistic authors and against Christian ones. Atheistic bias is always quick to show itself.

I would, therefore, prefer it if we could compare biases instead of pretending one

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of us doesn't have any to compare.

The Charges – so far

Not only does FF charge the TAG argument (i.e. the transcendental argument for the existence of God) of presuppositional apologetics (PA) as being “just plain fallacious”, he declares,

I will not, however, budge on my stance regarding the absolutely nonsensical idea of God somehow existing outside of existence. That has absolutely no meaning, it is completely incoherent and self-refuting, and thus I am fully justified in discarding it. If God exists it is necessarily part of reality, not apart from reality. Things that aren't part of reality by definition do not exist.

He appears not to see that he is assuming his view of existence to be true without argument or proof. From his reading of atheist critics he gets this:

the Mark story and say that Jesus isn't really a member of the 'Godhead', but rather was 'adopted' by God after his death...Jesus never even got the name 'Jesus' until after his death according to the gospel of Mark

He is yet to substantiate this claim from Mark.

Of the doctrine of the Trinity we get:

Either way, it makes little difference. I have been debating Christians for a while now³ and not once have I ever heard a coherent description of the so-called 'trinity'. I'll point out that it is incoherent to speak of one being being three beings, only for them to then back-peddle and say that it isn't that one being equals three beings, but rather that one being equals three persons, failing to realize that the word 'person' and the word 'being' are essentially synonyms.

Because he assumes his own position to be normative from the get-go, I am stuck with the charge of reifying nature! Reification is the fallacy of ascribing living/divine properties to the natural world. Of course, no Christian believes any such nonsense. FF is dismissing the Creator – creature distinction (that God is both within and without the universe which He created and upholds), without

³ Please note that I am aware that other believers have probably tried to set him straight on the doctrine of the Trinity, (and TAG for that matter), and that he is perhaps confusing what he chooses to believe with what is or is not coherent. I also take from this that FF likes to debate. I am not a debate junkie, and will only take a discussion as far as I think is profitable.

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even considering it.

Logic and What “Facts” Rely On

This brings me to my first real point, which is the issue of “fact.” FF is fond of the word. But what does he mean by it? In my worldview a fact is known as a fact if my interpretation of it matches the plan of the One who put it there. Further, my ability to ascertain factuality comes from my status as an image-bearer of the Creator. But what about the atheist? Surely he is not going to tell me that he knows facts by simply looking at them? He ought to know that no new found artifact (be it a pot-herd, a dinosaur bone, a clay tablet, or a bloody knife) screams its own interpretation to us. These things have no voice. They must be interpreted. The question then is, how is one to interpret the data? Our interpretation of facts is affected, often substantially, by our worldview.

FF wants to rely on “the facts of logic.” Very good. I wish to be logical too. But we have to have a worldview which can account for and incorporate the laws of logic. For example, suppose a stone-cold killer reasoned that since we evolved from the inexorable deterministic flow of matter and we therefore have no intrinsic worth as people, that killing people was disposing of other worthless things, would he be illogical? No, but he would not have a foundation for using logic either. And if we told him he was wrong or evil, but his worldview had no place for such moral concepts, we could not use logic to convince him. We would quickly find that our reasoning would sound to him like mere opinionizing; and why would our opinion be better than his?

This demonstrates that a). logic can be misused within differing outlooks, and b). that many outlooks cannot give an account of the logic which they do use.

Take this little exchange:

FF: Does your TAG not try to attribute the laws of logic to God?

Me: Of course. What do you attribute them to?

FF: The laws of logic exist because we created them. Why would you think otherwise? Was Aristotle an alien?

Me: ...I’m kind of betting your foundations to everything will be purely pragmatic though

FF (quoting me a little later) “Aristotle categorized the laws which were there.”

FF: No, Aristotle DESCRIBED the FACTS that were there. -

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The dictionary defines categorize as:

1. to arrange in categories or classes; classify.
2. to describe by labeling or giving a name to; characterize

Aristotle didn't categorize the laws of logic according to FF, he described them! This problem of defining terms reoccurs with FF. Nevertheless, he insists we "created" the laws of logic (I think he really means we categorized them), but that they are eternal.

So now we can get down to it. If logic is eternal and absolute (as FF agrees it is), whence logic? Since we are not eternal, we could not be the source of logic. The Christian reply is that since the laws of logic are laws of thought, the thought comes from the Triune God of Scripture, whose thought is perfectly rational. (This is given in the post [God Behind Everything](#) at the Telos website, which FF was directed to).

In responding to this it will not do for the atheist to simply assert that "logic is just there." We know logic, as beauty and justice and number, is "there", but we want to know the how and the why. As laws of thought logic requires a thinker. In the Biblical worldview there is an Eternal Thinker – God! God is the Source of logic, just as He is the Source of goodness and truth and love.

The bottom line is this: If a person wants to use logic to argue against the Christian worldview, he will need to supply a foundation for logic from his own worldview. If one is going to take a stand for logic, it makes no sense if one has no place for logic itself to stand! Before talking about what is and what is not logical, FF needs to show his basis for logic from an atheistic conception of life.

FF has responded to my first post in the combox of that post. Here I shall examine his remarks and add some new thoughts of my own. Unfortunately, he has not yet picked up the argument I made, neither has he relented from adopting his own position as normative. Now, I freely admit that if his outlook was normative I would not be arguing as I am. But neither would I be arguing at all, since, at least as far as I can see, all reasoning would be illusory; composed of the deterministic forces of matter and motion. I would have to agree with Sam Harris that there is no such thing as free agency. I believe what I do because that is the way my synapses are firing. FF believes the way he does for the same reason. There seems to be nothing but a futile finger-pointing available to us. Neither his Atheism nor my Christian Theism relate to anything outside our respective brain activity. That FF is debating shows that he believes free agency (here defined as 'the ability to formulate judgments which transcend the laws of physics and chemistry, which may connect to the extended world, and for which we are responsible'), is not illusory but meaningful. Again, worldviews are at issue here.

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Dear Fanghur,

Thank you for your response. I want to apologize for the wait. My schedule allows for limited time for this kind of interaction. Still, here is my reaction to your extended comment. I hope I shall be able to clear away some of the rubble which appears to be in the way of your seeing and evaluating my argument properly.

“No” to Natural Theology and Common Use of Reason

I want to begin by agreeing with you about the classical arguments for God’s existence: the ontological, cosmological (Kalam or otherwise), and teleological arguments. These all rest on a notion of what is called “natural theology,” which assumes a kind of neutral buffer-zone where Christians and non-Christians can meet to discuss their differences. Such a point of view is thoroughly unbiblical, as well as unsatisfying. I argue [here](#) that a Christian ought not to use natural theology. You are right that employing such “proofs” for God cannot end up with the Triune God of the Bible. One cannot use non-biblical philosophies to argue for the Biblical Worldview. It is for this reason I do not use them!

This admission effectively dismantles your whole comment (though you may not see it). This is because your response assumes I am in agreement with your use of reason, which is what I deny. On the contrary I hold that you are using a gift of God in rebellion to God. It is that denial and its basis which must be engaged. You still seem to assume you are on neutral territory. I tried to deal with that notion last time. You are *assuming* your worldview is able to account for the logic you are using. I contend both that neutrality is impossible, which is why I have admitted my own bias, but that you cannot justify logic in the first place, nevermind using it the way you do. You will understand at least from this that, *if I am right*, I have, in effect, issued you a call to repentance. In saying this I want you to know that I only stand where I do by grace, not by anything in me.

Restatement of TAG

The argument I have given you is a transcendental argument. One which inquires after the necessary conditions for something to be what it is. You said on FB that this presuppositional argument (or TAG) was “plainly fallacious.” But you have not really touched upon it in your response. This argument is that unless the God of the Bible is presupposed we are not able to make sense of anything in our experience. On the positive side, once we do accept the God who has revealed Himself supremely in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the foundation necessary for a coherent philosophy of life. For this reason you will see that it would be nonsensical of me to have the same starting point as you: for my whole assertion is that your starting point actually cannot “start.”

Now, even calling TAG “fallacious” implies that you stand outside of a worldview

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whose claim is that your use of logic cannot be justified from within your atheistic philosophy. I realize, of course, that you wholly reject this assertion (if you didn't you would be a Christian 😊), but that is the position I am arguing for. All you have to do is to rebut the argument by supplying the preconditions for the intelligibility of logic (or justice, science, order, and the rest) from your naturalistic worldview. The TAG argument of Van Til and others is that the proof of the Christian position is that unless you presuppose it you cannot make sense of anything. That is, to use Van Til's phrasing, the truth of the Christian worldview is established by what he called "the impossibility of the contrary." He stated,

Christianity alone does not crucify reason itself..the best, the only, the absolutely certain proof of the truth of Christianity is that unless its truth is presupposed there is no proof of anything.⁴

Certainly there is more to say than that, and Van Til's books are not easy reading, but that is the assertion. What he means here is not just challenging the unbeliever to make sense of the world, but positively making sense of it via the biblical revelation. That amounts to "certain proof." By contrast, from what you say, your philosophy of life floats on a Sea of Skepticism. You would make sense of miracles only when you believe a worldview which explains them. And what I say about miracles, holds true for rationality itself.

So far, the only thing I can make out is that you believe logic is eternal and absolute on the one hand, and that humans "created it" (by which I think you mean "identified & categorized it") on the other.

Revelational Epistemology

The presuppositional apologetic stands upon a revelatory theory of knowledge. Giving some instances (which I am not here pulling out as proofs per se): if we are really created in God's rational image, in distinction to the animals, we would expect to be rationalizing and theorizing agents, able to express ourselves verbally, mathematically, pictorially, and architecturally in the world out there. The filling out of this sort of thing is the job of Theology, which I try to do through TELOS. *But what would you put in place of these instances?*

You see, this is where worldview meets everyday experience. When Newton and Kepler conceived of science as "thinking God's thoughts after Him", that was a natural result of their worldview. But the atheist is left with a world without plan or purpose. He has no mandate to explore and analyze creation and exult in the wonders of nature. Therefore, the "why?" in "why do science?" is a colossal word. **Why** should he trust his senses? How can he know the real world beyond himself? If he is just a part in the inexorable evolutionary machinery of the universe, how can he hold to absolutes, and how does he escape from the

⁴ Quoted in Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 61.

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clutches of subjectivity? These are huge questions.

Recall that the Christian Bible asserts that the unbeliever is utilizing concepts and criteria borrowed from God and smuggled into unbelieving interpretations of life. Reason, justice, normativity, ethical norms, induction, truth, goodness, scientific laws: these lay outside of those unbiblical outlooks. It is the importing of these good gifts of God into philosophies which cannot support them nor account for them, which renders the unbeliever culpable (John 3:19-21; Romans 1:18-25). The Christian worldview is expressed in the treatment of Christian Theology. If you stood within it you would not be making the jibes against it that you do.

‘Q’, Pantheism and Deism

Now, I love ‘Q’ from Star Trek. I wish he had been in one of the movies. Q is depicted as omnipotent. But he is part of a continuum of omnipotents (who in one episode strip him of his power). Of course, that is a contradiction in terms. He is selfish, immature, unethical, vengeful, and ignorant of many things. He always is coming to knowledge. Hence, Q is more like a Greco-Roman or Norse god. He is very unlike the Trinitarian God of Scripture! Compare, for example, Q with Jesus Christ. There just is no comparison.

Pantheism is the view that God and the universe is one. As such it is monistic. If all is really one then there can be no differentiation, and hence no predication at the core of existence. This destroys rationality and so is false.

Deism is the belief in an absentee god. Hence this god is not the God of the Bible. Who then is he/she? (or what?). What are its attributes? How do we make such a god the cause of all predication? How can a coherent world and life view get going under these conditions? Again, we end up not being able to account for experience.

“This is What You Believe Whether You Admit It or Not”

The line above is not a quote, but represents an accurate paraphrase of the atheist [FF - who just showed up one day dissing presuppositional apologetics], whom I have been debating on the TELOS Facebook page and here. It is because of this attitude that I have called a halt to the proceedings. It is also the attitude of the individual who FF is relying on to guide him through the VanTillian methodology. Unfortunately for him this “guide” is completely inept and misunderstands presuppositionism as much as FF does.

In the first part of this series I wrote this:

*The assertion of PA is not that unbelievers do not know things. **It is that they are unable to account for what they know using their unbelieving outlooks. And if they cannot account for the their arguments from within their own outlook, they should***

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give it up and find one that does account for it. And Christian presuppositionalists claim that the only outlook or worldview which accounts for facts, values, logic, justice, beauty, etc. is the Christian worldview of the Bible.

THAT is what we were supposed to be discussing. What the presuppositional argument seeks for is a comparison of philosophies of life. So naturally, PA presses the challenger to articulate their worldview. In philosophical terms, we need their theory of reality (what constitutes the world), their epistemology (how do they know what they claim to know?), and their ethics (what constitutes the good and why?). In the case of Biblical Christianity that information is to be drawn from the Bible: it is what we call Christian Theology.

Without the conversation being centered on that ground the TAG argument cannot really begin. The Christian who is obeying 2 Corinthians 10:5 is not going to surrender his position before the discussion has got off the ground. And we do not expect the non-Christian to capitulate so easily either.

Although it was clear to me immediately that FF did not know whereof he was speaking, I hoped he would come around by paying attention to what I said. He continued to plow a furrow miles away from the right field, so the conversation stopped. From the very outset FF was told he had mischaracterized TAG (the transcendental argument for God's existence), and was given a true definition and example. But he and one or two others, is convinced that I am using the charge of misrepresentation as a feint to excuse myself from an embarrassing defeat at his hands.

He was quick – very quick – to react the instant he thought he was being misrepresented. But was as slow as a tortoise in correcting himself on the many occasions the boot was on the other foot. If he had paid attention he would have started setting out and discussing his worldview; perhaps with a justification of logic? But he did not. And when, at the close of the discussion, he blithely stated that we “created logic” and that “the laws of logic DON'T work in the extended world”, and that “If we die, the laws of logic die with us”, well, I haven't got the time to mess around with “reasoning” like that.

Yes, I know. That position on logic alone destroys itself and all rational discourse about the world, but FF doesn't see it, and I cannot get him to. He remains ignorant both of his own presuppositions, of Christian theology, and the presuppositional argument which he sallied forth to attack. Since this ignorance is irresistible (meaning he will not be corrected) the discussion was called off.

The mentality involved here is, from one angle, hard to fathom. If an atheist who had been teaching his arguments for years at grad level told me I was not understanding him and was caricaturing his reasoning, I would, out of fairness

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and respect, try harder to reach agreement on what he was saying. For me to arrogantly claim I understood him and had refuted him (in ten minutes no less!), while my opponent was calmly telling me I had completely missed the thrust of his argument, would be the height of pseudo-intellectual hubris. FF plays this part, and so I decided that to proceed with him would be pointless and a waste of everybody's time.

But the issues raised do provide me with a chance at demonstrating presuppositionalism again. Since FF never really interacted with TAG (despite his conviction otherwise), there is not much in his writing which is very helpful as an attempted rebuttal of it. But I shall be able to utilize it all the same as a foil for PA. I shall also examine some other miscues from other atheists who agreed with him (as well as the ridiculous video clip he depends on). I shall take my time doing this. Perhaps I shall use another four or five posts. This will, I hope, help believers for whom this kind of apologetic is new.

Atheists Are Unbiased – Really!

The default position of nearly every atheist you will come up against will be that they are neutral. They just want the facts. They are patiently waiting to be convinced that Christianity is not a bunch of illogical hokum. That entirely naive stance is the whole basis for their argument against Christianity, and they will try to stick to it like super-glue. It is the thickest stump on their argumentative stool. Knock it away and watch the whole thing fall. Atheists must tenaciously believe in the phantom of neutrality. To change the metaphor, it is the curtain behind which their prejudicial opinions and raw emotions conceal themselves. When you point out to them that no one is without bias they will very often ignore the comment. That is precisely what FF did. He is a naturalist (probably a philosophical materialist, although he never got round to declaring himself). As a naturalist he will only accept naturalistic explanations of things. Supernaturalism is out. Hence, the Christian worldview is out: not (please note) at the end of the discussion, but before we even start! And that's what being *unbiased* looks like.



The Christian should expect this, although it takes very little effort to see where his bias lies. As for me, I owned up to my Christian bias right off the bat. The transcendental argument (TAG) requires the believer to do just that, and it is only honest to do it. I am not neutral. Before I became a Christian I thought I was – but I was not. I was anti-Christian! I refused to accept the Bible as God's Word without even reading it and considering its worldview. Also, I had my own ideas about what "faith" was (something like believing in what you know isn't true), and I wasn't going to allow a person of faith to correct me. Now, long after I recommended he peruse my Statement of Faith so he would know what I believed, FF blurted out on Facebook that he had no respect for anyone who had a Statement of Faith. He thought a Christian having such a thing was

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“intellectually dishonest!” In his book declaring what one believes is intellectually dishonest. Ummm....??? Right.

If Atheism is True, How Does One Explain the Existence of Logic, etc?

The atheist wants to start with reason. BUT – only if he can keep it's use within his own atheistic worldview! He must set the rules of the game. He is unbiased you see! Now, the Christian certainly wants to reason too. But will he reason from an atheistic position? How preposterous! No, he will reason from a Christian position. That is *his* bias. The atheist must be intellectually honest enough to admit that he too has a bias. As I pointed out before, being biased in the direction of the truth is a good thing. But the question now arises, ***which bias – that of the atheist (in this case) or the Christian – leads to the truth?***

For that question to be answered, we must explore the foundational set of presuppositions which lead us to argue the way we do. We must explore and critique each others worldviews. The atheist can ask me how I account for logic and its compartment with the world beyond ourselves (i.e. in analysis of things in the world or with discussions with other people)? I will ask him the same question, and we will see which one makes sense of experience and which one doesn't. It is my contention that my Statement of Faith, to the degree that it correctly mirrors the Bible, does provide the necessary preconditions for logic (it reflects the mind of God), justice and ethics (which reflect the holy character of God), history (grounded in the creation and providence of God), science (grounded in creation and our imaging God and our God given ability to explore the world, and God's promise in the Noahic covenant), love (the character of God), and on and on. In the Christian outlook then, we must pursue the knowledge of God through His Self-revelation in order to know about ourselves and the world. And the Biblical Worldview informs us how we can do that.

What about the atheist? How does he fare?

FF thinks he has answered this problem by asserting “we created logic.” I already replied that if this is so logic is not eternal since we are not eternal, and there is no reason to believe it corresponds to anything beyond our brains. If logic is an “accident” dependent upon human minds, we must ask two follow up questions: 1. how does the atheist account for the fact that logic connects with the world outside? (I'm going to ignore FF's ridiculous view that it doesn't, since if that were true he couldn't reason with or about anything but himself. And he couldn't even do that since logic requires classes of things beyond us to function), 2. if all reality comes from chaos, like atheists believe, how does physical chaos produce non-physical laws of thought?

The standard reply is that, as I have already said, the atheist declares “logic is just there.” Is that giving a pre-condition for logic? Suppose I visit San Francisco with a friend and we gaze at the Golden Gate Bridge, and my friend asks me

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how it got there. I respond, "It's just there!" Would anyone think I had answered my friend's question? No, they would think I was a bit dense for answering that way. In effect, a "how did that get there?" question is a *precondition* question; an inquiry seeking an account of something. The presuppositionalist wants the atheist to answer the "how did it get there?" questions about logic, beauty, love, induction and deduction, history, justice, goodness, evil, and the rest. He wants the atheist to stop muttering "can't we agree that it's just there" and begin making sense of it using only his atheist beliefs. When the atheist finally comes down off his high-horse and begins providing a philosophy of atheism which can explain all this, something interesting will happen. He will get confused and tongue-tied. He will try to base rationality upon original irrationality; ethical norms on the revolving door of Darwinian blind contingency; and he will back away from explaining the reliability of our senses faster than you can say "don't say it's just there."

No, We Can't Just Agree

We see then that the Christian is not to allow the atheist to pretend he can use terms like "rational", "logical", "wrong", "true", until he has supplied us a workable definition of those words which comport with the way he claims the world really is. According to FF, the precondition (the precondition, mind) of logic is "we created them." The precondition for normative ethics is, "the desire not to harm or be harmed."

Just think about this a second. If we created the laws of logic they would really only be rules of logic akin to rules of a game. But, of course, they are not like that. Logic is law-like whether we are rational (i.e. following the laws of logic) or not. They therefore, do not depend on us. If they do not depend on us, how can we create them? If I say, "my birthplace is in Manchester, England", and "my birthplace is not in Manchester, England", I am contradicting myself. I am contradicting myself about a place outside of myself (Manchester exists whether or not I was born there). Does that fact depend on whether or not I believe it? No. Does the fact that there is a contradiction depend on whether I see one or not? No again. And what applies to me applies equally to every person ever born. These laws (like the laws of science) exist independently of our minds. We did not "create them." How will the atheist account for this obvious fact? If they say logic evolved with the cosmos then logic (and math) cannot be law-like or necessary. And perhaps the laws of logic will alter as we evolve further, so that what is illogical now will become somehow logical in the future? Of course, such a view of logic as mutable makes all reason relative.

What about ethics? Does the view of ethics as "the desire that we not harm or be harmed" sound more like an opinion to you? Do you know of any human beings who desire to harm others? If they have that desire via evolution, how can it be "wrong"? Ever heard of the Spartans? or the Mayans? Who is FF to

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say those who differ from him are unethical? Where is their authority for this declaration? Why would such desires (more like instincts) be considered in terms of right and wrong anyway? You see, FF has not given a foundation for morality at all. He has given his opinion. In fact, even one of his fellow atheists on FB rejected such a view in favor of a pragmatic personal agenda. In his case, having more than two kids was unethical in today's crowded world. Right and wrong is relative depending on the assumed needs of the moment. Here are some more differing opinions:

Rape is "a natural, biological phenomenon that is a product of the human evolutionary heritage," akin to "the leopard's spots and the giraffe's elongated neck."⁵

As evolutionists, we see that no [ethical] justification of the traditional kind is possible. Morality, or more strictly our belief in morality, is merely an adaptation put in place to further our reproductive ends. Hence the basis of ethics does not lie in God's will.... In an important sense, ethics as we understand it is an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate. It is without external grounding.⁶

You see, in the atheist worldview there is no *normative* ethics. There is just opinion. As Nietzsche rightly said, all that is left is a "will to power," and whoever has the power can determine what is ethical. Atheism cannot produce an "ought" from a naturalistic "is."

The "Fundamental Flaw"

It was not until I listened to the preposterous eight minute video that FF linked to that I understood where he got his harebrained perspective on the presuppositional argument from, and why he really thought he'd nailed it to the wall. In that video the pseudo-intellectual tells us that,

The fundamental flaw of TAG [the transcendental argument for God's existence] "is that proponents of this argument fail to make a distinction between the LAWS of logic and what these laws refer to."

Then the voice on the video plays a short segment from a presentation by Jason Lisle of AiG where this "flaw" is supposedly in evidence. He goes on to use some scurrilous epithets to describe Dr. Lisle, including calling him a liar.

As it happens I own the complete set of these presentations, so I was able to confirm whether or not this segment fairly represented Lisle's views on logic. Anyone care to bet on the outcome?

5 Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer, "Why Men Rape," 2000

6 E. O. Wilson and Michael Ruse, "The Evolution of Ethics," 1991

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That's right. The real liar was the atheist name-caller. If he had possessed the entire presentation which Lisle gave he would know that just a couple of minutes after the clip he used to demonstrate that Lisle (and all us presuppositionalists remember) equates logic with the things it speaks of, Lisle says that the laws of logic describe concepts, *not* the things in themselves – 'Ultimate Proof of Creation', at 45.57 minute mark.

In other words, Lisle teaches precisely what the erstwhile debunker claims he doesn't understand! We'll return to this character another time.

Now, perhaps it was because I couldn't descend to this menial level that I didn't twig to what, for FF, seemed to be a coup de grace? I guess my saying such things as "Of course concepts are immaterial. They are in and of the mind", and repeatedly asking him to explain, using his atheism, how these thoughts connect with the world out there, didn't clue him or his supporters in enough?

In the combox of the second post here I asked him to supply an epistemology by which he knew what he claimed to know. He didn't give one. I had earlier put to him the following questions:

Why should he [the atheist] trust his senses? How can he know the real world beyond himself? If he is just a part in the inexorable evolutionary machinery of the universe, how can he hold to absolutes, and how does he escape from the clutches of subjectivity?

The very best FF could come up with was this:

First of all, all of us have to assume the validity of our senses to varying degrees, with the exception of ACTUAL self-attesting truths like the Law of Identity.

Apart from confusing "self-attesting" (which relates to a verbal & ultimate authority for those who accept it), with "self-evident", this response assumes the very point under scrutiny. Why is logic self-evident? and why do these laws and concepts access reality? Further, for the law of identity to work one needs to identify something "out there."

If one turns to a standard text on logic, about the first thing one will be confronted with is examples of propositions. For instance, Copi and Cohen's *Introduction to Logic* (11th edition), gives many examples, ALL of which depend upon concepts relating to the outside world. Although FF denies that logic "works" in the extended world, I shall refrain from throwing away the book!

FF wants to teach me that, "All the formulas, symbols, rules, forms, etc. are man made."

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Well, if he means the characters (A, P, S, X, ^, 1, 2, 3, 4, I, II, III, IV, etc.), who doesn't know that? But I am interested in the realities which the characters represent. And they are not human inventions. Nor could they be. Even if one accepts the ludicrous idea of the macro-evolutionary "Tree of Life", there were certain numbers of animals around before man could count them. The presence of a human counter is irrelevant to the existence of the logic which differentiates and the numbers which accrue. We invented the symbolic representations. We most certainly did not invent logic and numbers. They are eternal, being aspects of the mind of God.

"I personally believe that existence is eternal" he opined. He admits to being a "metaphysical naturalist" so that all that exists is the natural realm. Yet he believes in immaterial realities like logic. And since he is adamant that we created the laws of logic, he must believe the material realm created the immaterial realm. But wait. He surely does not believe in the eternity of matter? If he doesn't, yet insists existence is eternal, that only leaves immaterial existence (which he must explain)! See the contradiction?

Moreover, just think about that concept. If we created the laws of logic, it would mean that we were once illogical! If we were illogical in our thinking before we invented logic, how did we stumble upon logic? In the atheist worldview, as I have already said, the rational comes out of the irrational!

I loved this one:

You are setting up a false dichotomy...True and false is not a true dichotomy. True and not true, that's the true dichotomy.

FF wanted me to look at a dictionary to define "unnecessary" (if I remember right). Shall we look up the definition of "untrue"? But why bother? FF himself assumes that "false = untrue" in the very statement he made. This is how the nonsense goes. It is utterly arbitrary.

Divine Attributes of Logic

I have said that logic exists because God exists. The structure of our thought and the structure of the universe in which that thought can be actualized have not come about accidentally; they are "there" because of the existence of the perfectly rational Creator God. The existence of the laws of logic, and our capability in identifying and utilizing them find their explanation in the biblical depiction of our formation as image-bearers of God, given a mandate to explore the created order. What makes absolutely no sense is to say that these laws of rationality came out from a mindless irrational chaos.

Logic has the property of immateriality (it is *ideational*, being a product of thought). In a sense it also is eternal, transcendent, true, and good. These are

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attributes of logic. As John Frame likes to say, “God’s attributes have attributes.” But FF wishes to have eternal laws of thought without a thinker!

Vern Poythress writes,

Rationality is a sine qua non for logic. But as we know, rationality belongs to persons, not to rocks, trees, and subpersonal creatures. If logic is rational, which we assume it is, then it is also personal.⁷

FF wants the law of identity to obtain even when there is nothing to identify. He does this because he treats “nothingness” merely as a sign and not as actual nothingness. That is to say, the word “nothing” is being confused with nothing at all in the same way the word “cow” might be confused with the animal with hoofs and horns that goes moo. The word which signifies the animal is not the animal, and the word which signifies nothingness is not itself nothingness – it is a word! (The alert reader will see instantly that FF is guilty of the very equivocation he wrongly accused me of).

How does the atheist understand the universe? Well, atheists believe it came about from the womb of chaos. They believe it came from an explosion. That is the epitome of disorder. Yet out of this disorder, we are supposed to believe that all the order we see comes. Whatismore, we are to swallow the fantastic idea that the laws of thought come from this same chaos. These laws are known to comport with the world beyond ourselves, so that the law of identity and the law of non-contradiction make sense in the extended world. But the atheist must say that these compartments are accidental (in the philosophical sense), not necessary; for how can chaotic matter and motion produce necessary laws of logic which connect mans allegedly evolved mind with the universe?

If this is the belief of atheists, as I believe it is (and I could furnish many quotations by evolutionists from Bertrand Russell to Richard Dawkins which confirm this), then it is appropriate for me to go on and demand from the atheist what his most treasured and central presuppositions about reality are. How does he know anything he claims to know?

The biblical answer to this is that the unbeliever is sinfully employing God-given truths and abilities in rebellion to their Giver. Hence, the Bible supplies both the reason for these truths and abilities, and an explanation of why unbelievers use them in service of a worldview which cannot support them. As Van Til would say, “Antitheism Presupposes Theism.”

I want to close off this series of apologetics posts by considering some more quasi-intellectualism from the critic of presuppositional apologetics whom my debater FF relied upon for most of his reasoning. I have named him “Flaw” since he claims to have found the “fundamental flaw” within presuppositional

⁷ Vern Poythress, *Logic: A God-Centered Approach to the Foundation of Western Thought*, 68.

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apologetics. In his eight minute video rebuttal of the transcendental argument for God (TAG), he sounded clever, but sounded was the operative word. Consider that in setting presuppositionalists straight Flaw's starting point is:

“The necessity of reality itself.”

One might think that this is a natural enough place to begin. But look again at what is being asserted. “Reality” (without God mind you) is “necessary.” Now a necessary thing is something which does not depend on anything else for what it is, but which other things need for their existence. To give a formal definition. “Necessary” is,

[The] quality of a being that has the cause of its existence within itself; not ontologically dependent.⁸

Right from the get-go our critic of presuppositional apologetics is in the mud. Does he really intend to stand on the assertion that “reality” is “necessary”? If so, which part or parts of “reality” are necessary (i.e. non-contingent?). He doesn't say.

What, we may inquire, is “reality” in this point of view? Perhaps it's the natural world? But is this planet's eco-system necessary, in the sense above? Of course it isn't. The rest of the Cosmos could go on doing its thing without Earth being there.

Very well, is he saying “reality” as the Cosmos? is necessary? He can't mean the Cosmos is necessary surely? Which astro-physicist or astronomer will agree with him on that one? Not even those who tout the Anthropic principle will go so far as to say the universe is necessary. In fact, not even any Christian theologian will say such a thing, since the universe is created by God.

Flaw pushes God out of the equation. God isn't part of “reality” for him and his fellow atheists. But again, just what does the guy mean by the word “reality”? Does he mean “matter”? If he means matter is necessary then he must believe it is eternal, which contradicts the law of entropy. Now it is true that you must have matter if you are to have material objects, but then Flaw must be willing to come down off his philosophical perch and admit to using “necessary” in a non-technical manner, signifying something like “constituent.” In that case all he would be stating is the rather bland fact that material objects are made out of matter! A silly statement.

Note also that Flaw is speaking of “reality” as if he knows it is external to himself. Fine, but how does he *know* that this “reality” is actually what his senses report to his brain that it is? How does he *know* his brain is not constructing the outside world? And how does he *know* it is necessary? He

⁸ William H. Halverson, *A Concise Introduction to Philosophy*, (4th edition), 483.

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philosophizes:

There cannot be no reality at all. There are always facts. And since facts are about something, something necessarily has to exist.

Okay, so “reality” is made up of “facts.” What “facts” are these? Are they “facts” about the world beyond his brain? Just what “facts” are those and how does he arrive at them? How does he know there is more than one fact? Eastern monists, for example, would object to any assertion of factual duality.

But Flaw is certain that “facts” (plural) exist. Moreover, he refers to “the relationships between those entities.”

Wow! So not only does this guy *know* that reality is “necessary” because “there are always facts”, but he knows “the relationships between those entities.” Take that David Hume! Flaw appears to have solved Hume’s critique of cause and effect.

Further, he opines, “the law of identity is a *description* of the fact of identity.”

Still tracking? He has claimed a great deal about what he “knows”, and yet has said nothing to back any of it up. We are just supposed to shut up and agree with him since he *knows* there are “facts” which are “necessary” (i.e. not reliant upon other things), and he can point us to “the relationships between those entities” (since he can identify whether they are the same or not by trusting his senses). From this fake ‘solid platform’ he is in a position to tell us that the law of logic we call the law of identity *describes* identity between things.

I realize readers will think this is all obvious. But the TAG approach asks for what lies behind and supports these obvious things. Flaw, FF, and atheists generally simply take it all for granted. When asked to provide the preconditions for our knowledge of the external world, or the relationships between facts, or the laws of logic, they retreat into the sort of pseudo-philosophy I have been critiquing.

Back on Planet Earth, you will recall that the transcendental argument for the existence of the biblical God is that unless He is presupposed you cannot make sense out of anything. So we have asked (many times), “how does the atheist account for the laws of logic?” The unpacking of that question entails the answers to questions about how we know what the extended world is like (which the laws of logic *describe*), and how we explain the relationship between concepts, classes, sets, numbers, etc, which are in our minds, and the entities out there (let alone their cause and effect relationships)?

Sound like a tall order? That’s because it is – unless you presuppose the God of the Bible and the teaching of the Bible about “reality.”

Rising Above The Level of Opinion

After we have been graced with a sensible answer to the question of rationality and the laws of thought we can move on to justice or truth, or history, or knowledge. But we will not hold our breath, for we have discovered that, behind the facade of cultured superiority, there nearly always lurks the decrepit supporting columns of arbitrariness and personal pontification.

Flaw is just taking a whole raft of things for granted. These are the very things which TAG wants him to account for! His starting premises are presented as foundational truths, but are really only his opinions.

For instance, in claiming that “there cannot be no reality at all” he is precluding nothingness. But why, from his standpoint, would one preclude nothingness? In answer to the fundamental question, “why is there anything instead of nothing?” the usual reply is something like, “well, there is something so why inquire?” – which is not an answer! But at least we don’t hear that “reality” is necessary.

“Nothingness” is not something. It contains *no* facts. There are no “facts” which can be identified and pondered. “Nothing” has no properties. It is the total absence of any fact. The only “fact” we can say about nothingness is that the absence of all properties is *called* “nothingness.” But the name is not the “nothingness” itself. In fact, the only way one can talk about nothing is if there is *something*.

As Flaw and FF surely see (since they make so much of it in their critique of the transcendental argument), the *description* is not the thing itself. To paraphrase his own words back to him, “the fundamental flaw is that this argument fails to make a distinction between the concept of nothingness and what it refers to.”

So why is there something rather than nothing? It would not stretch a novice to see that because there is something does not mean that that something is necessary.

To return to my point, Flaw’s statements about knowing “reality” and necessary facts and their relationships is on a par with FF’s views about morality or neutrality or God. They fail to rise above the level of opinion.

Being a Free Thinker

It is always amusing to read atheist self-impressions. They are “free thinkers”; Prometheans in thought. But does their worldview support the idea of freewill and free thought? How do they make sense of being a “free” thinker when their own view of themselves is that they are materially directed evolved machines, fulfilling their instincts? Have you noticed that when one of these “freethinkers” does try to provide a foundation for their position, that it descends from opinion to animal instinct, which terminates in the deterministic forces behind our

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individual brain chemistry?

These Freethinkers need to tell the truth to themselves. Under the godless regime of naturalistic forces, all their free thinking is “accidental-thinking” – meaning predetermined, and, like the forces they worship, non-teleological; pointless. If that is where their worldview spills them out then, in the end, it appears Bertrand Russell’s sarcastic swipe at William James’s pragmatic account of truth may be applied to many atheistic assertions about “reality” – “a truth is anything which it pays to believe.”

The trouble is, the dubious payment for being a freethinker stops at death and is replaced by payment of another sort (Jn. 3:36). In stark contrast the words of Jesus come down to us through the ages: “everyone that is of the truth hears My voice.” (Jn. 18:37).

It is that voice which makes “reality” intelligible!



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