

# Classical Presuppositional Apologetics: Re-introducing an Old Theme

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## Introduction

A recent book edited by Steven B. Cowan introduces five different methods of doing apologetics: classical, evidential, cumulative case, presuppositional, and Reformed epistemology apologetics. My lecture last week adopted Bernard Ramm's division of apologetic methods into three: those that stress the uniqueness of the Christian experience of grace; those that stress natural theology as the starting point for apologetics; and those that stress revelation as the foundation on which apologetics must be built." Roughly speaking, classical and evidential apologetics fit into the second of these three; cumulative case apologetics combines the first and second; presuppositional apologetics fits into the third; and Reformed epistemology apologetics combines the second and third. In this lecture I would like to survey briefly for you the strengths and weaknesses of the five methods as described in Cowan's book (required reading last year for this course) and then suggest to you a different version of the fourth method, presuppositional apologetics, and explain why I favor it. I do not intend here to argue that you should ignore and reject everything about the other systems; I believe a good apologist can incorporate much from all of them. Yet I do think that, judged by epistemological adequacy, what I here venture to call *classical presuppositional apologetics*, something far removed from the sort of presuppositional apologetics most commonly thought of—that pioneered by Cornelius Van Til and carried on especially by his disciples Greg Bahnsen and John Frame—is more adequate than competing options.

First, I shall review for you the five apologetic methods Cowan's *Five Views on Apologetics*. In the process of discussing presuppositional apologetics, I shall distinguish between Van Tilian presuppositionalism (the sort Frame embraces) and what I here call classical presuppositionalism, showing them really to be two exclusive methods. Then I shall briefly make my case for preferring classical presuppositional apologetics to all of the five methods considered in Cowan's book and illustrate its application briefly by reviewing Gordon H. Clark's argument for the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible in chapter one of his *God's Hammer*.

Third, I shall present a more detailed application of classical presuppositional apologetics, using as an example Gordon H. Clark's *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, a fine representative of the approach. I shall acquaint you with how Clark, the twentieth century's leading classical presuppositionalist, applied the method first to the fundamental question of the relationship between faith and reason and then to several powerful challenges to the Christian faith related to the philosophy of language, ethics, and the problem of evil.

Fourth and last, I shall discuss how classical presuppositionalism relates to two major concerns of classical (and evidential and cumulative case) apologetics: theistic proofs and

historical evidences. In the process it should be clear that classical presuppositionalism differs significantly from Van Tilian presuppositionalism in that it recognizes important roles for both theistic proofs and historical evidences in the overall apologetic task, not merely paying them lip service (as Van Tilian presuppositionalists are wont to do) but providing the only firm foundation on which they can rest.

It should, by the way, become apparent to you soon that professors for this course reject four of the five apologetic methods in Cowan's book: evidentialism, cumulative case apologetics, presuppositionalism as Frame presents it, and Reformed epistemology apologetics. For two reasons I suspect we are much closer in apologetic outlook than would be apparent merely by saying that Dr. Kilpatrick and Dr. Kennedy embrace classical apologetics and Professor Beisner embraces presuppositional apologetics. First, classical apologetics defines itself in part by its rejection of Van Tilian presuppositionalism, and on this point classical presuppositional apologetics agrees. Second, classical apologetics affirms the reality of innate ideas (logic and the existence of God, at least), and classical presuppositionalism does likewise. Third, classical apologetics affirms the use of theistic proofs and historical evidences insofar as they are valid, and classical presuppositionalism, contrary to some common misconceptions, does likewise.

Two last points before I conclude this introduction: (1) Pinning labels on men cannot substitute for a careful and substantive evaluation of their apologetic positions. A corollary is that merely adopting a label for oneself is no substitute for an informed and philosophically careful evaluation of alternative principles and methods of apologetics, followed by an equally careful construction of one's own apologetic. (2) The criticisms I offer of the various apologetic methods here are broad and general. It would take far more time than is available here to render minute, painstaking criticism of details in the methods,<sup>1</sup> and such an endeavor, while no doubt worthwhile

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<sup>1</sup>One example of the nit-picking sort of criticism I have in mind but shall avoid in the main text of this lecture is this: Kelly James Clark, defending Reformed epistemology apologetics, proposes as one argument against W. K. Clifford's famous demand that every belief be based on adequate evidence, "Even if we had the leisure to test all of our beliefs, we could not meet the demand. Since we cannot meet that demand, we cannot be obligated to do so." (Clark, "Reformed Epistemology Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, edited by Steven B. Cowan [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 266-84, at 270.) I have no doubt that Clark is right in asserting that, even had we leisure to test all our beliefs, we could not meet the demand (at least in this life). But it is not at all apparent how it follows from our inability to meet the demand that we are not obligated to do so. Indeed, it is particularly surprising to see Clark, who professes to embrace Reformed theology, using such an argument. Our Lord commands all of us, "be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). But of course because we are all born sinners that is impossible. Far from excusing us from the obligation, our inherent sinfulness aggravates our failure. As the late Gordon H. Clark pointed out:

It is human nature, depraved human nature, to attempt to avoid responsibility for wrong doing. In seeking to excuse himself for an evil act, a man may assign the blame to his tempter, as Adam and Eve did, or to compelling and extenuating circumstances, or to something else more remote or ultimate. The insincerity of this procedure becomes apparent when we notice that men do not try to avoid praise and honor by referring their good acts to ultimate causes. They wish to escape blame, but they are willing, only too willing, to accept compliments. The Christian view, however, is clearly expressed in David's great confession. David did not complain, I have sinned a great sin, but alas, I was born sinful and could not help it; so, do not blame me too much. On the contrary, David said, I have sinned a great sin; and what makes it all the worse is that I was born that way; I could not help it, for I myself am evil. (Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* [Jefferson, MD (now Unicoi, TN): Trinity Foundation, 1986], 236.)

The notion that inability dissolves obligation is Arminian, not Calvinist. Kelly Clark, a professing Calvinist, should

in some circumstances, does not, in my estimation, well suit the needs of students in this course.

## I. Review of five apologetic methods in Cowan's book

### A. Classical apologetics

Classical apologetics, as Cowan writes in the introduction to his book, “begins by employing natural theology to establish theism as the correct worldview. After God’s existence has thus been shown, the classical method moves to a presentation of the historical evidences for the deity of Christ, the trustworthiness of Scripture, et cetera, to show that Christianity is the best version of theism. . . .”<sup>2</sup> William Lane Craig, in his essay on classical apologetics in that book, defines it as the approach in which “reason in the form of rational arguments and evidence plays an essential role in our showing Christianity to be true,” but he immediately adds, “whereas reason in this form plays a contingent and secondary role in our personally knowing Christianity to be true.”<sup>3</sup> That is, Craig distinguishes between objective persuasion (showing Christianity to be true) and subjective conviction (knowing Christianity to be true). For Craig, the rational and historical arguments of apologetics *show* Christianity to be true, but only the witness of the Holy Spirit, which occurs in what might be called regeneration, enlightenment, or conviction, enables one to *know* that Christianity is true. Because all of the views make this distinction, albeit with nuances in how they do so, I shall not dwell on it in this lecture more than to remark that Jesus Himself said, “unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”—see, that is, not sense with the eyes and the optic nerve and the optic center in the brain, but comprehend, affirm, and embrace (John 3:3). Faith is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8) imparted in regeneration (John 5:24) and equated with illumination (Ephesians 4:17-21). It is not, therefore, the result of rational persuasion, whether by natural theology or historical evidences, absent the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. But apologetics is properly concerned not so much with God’s sovereign act of imparting faith as with the task of showing the faith to be true. Therefore our focus here is on showing, not knowing.

Classical apologetics, then, employs rational arguments and evidences to show that the Christian faith is true. It contrasts with Van Tilian presuppositionalism by insisting that believers and nonbelievers do have enough rational common ground (at least the laws of logic) to carry on intelligent argument with each other. According to Craig, important adherents of classical apologetics have been Thomas Aquinas, whose Five Ways are examples of natural theology and whose appeals to miracles and prophecy are examples of the use of evidences, Hugo Grotius, and William Paley. Important contemporary adherents, according to Cowan, are R. C. Sproul, Norman L. Geisler, Stephen T. Davis, and Richard Swinburne—plus of course Craig himself.

Compared with the other four positions presented in Cowan’s book, **classical apologetics has significant strengths**. By arguing first for the existence of God, it avoids the question-begging procedure of evidential apologetics, which purports to use historical evidences to prove the occurrence of what deists and atheists (among other sorts of metaphysical naturalists) say are simply impossible, namely, supernatural events, i.e., miracles. By recognizing the clear

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have known better, as did Gordon H. Clark, the more consistent Calvinist. But such minute criticisms are not the sort of greatest value at this stage in this course.

<sup>2</sup>Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics*, Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 15.

<sup>3</sup>William Lane Craig, “Classical Apologetics,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Cowan, 26-55, at 27.

dependence of evidential arguments for miracles on theism, it avoids the similar philosophical naivete of cumulative case apologetics. By recognizing some rational common ground with nonbelievers, it avoids the epistemological isolationism (not to say solipsism) of Van Tilian presuppositionalism. And by insisting on the importance of arguing, it avoids the *de facto* surrender of the rational contest to which Reformed epistemology apologetics amounts *if taken at face value* (although I shall argue later that Reformed epistemology apologetics should not be taken at face value and that its practice is better than its theory).

However, **classical apologetics also has some significant weaknesses**. First, it attends insufficiently to the presuppositions underlying its own and its opponents' arguments—its opponents not only among competing methods of Christian apologetics but also, and more importantly, among the critics of the Christian faith. For an example related to its own arguments, it begins by employing natural theology. But it is not clear that one can employ natural theology apart from presupposing theism and perhaps even some special revelation without committing a *petitio principii*, that is, without begging the question. (I hasten to caution that to point this out is not to deny the legitimacy of natural theology; it is not even to address that question. It is, however, to suggest that some elements of arguments employed by natural theology may be indefensible otherwise than by appeal to the existence of God and some propositional revelation from Him.) It would take more time than is available in this context to demonstrate, for example, the at best questionable status of the principle of causation on any grounds other than theism and special revelation, but I do at least have the time to point out that assuming the reality of causation, as classical apologetics does in most of its theistic proofs (certainly Thomas's arguments from motion, efficient cause, possibility and necessity, and design—the first, second, third, and fifth of his Five Ways; certainly also in other versions of the cosmological and teleological arguments), means begging the question if causality cannot be defended on any but theistic grounds. Since David Hume argued powerfully that empirical observation by itself is incapable even of perceiving, let alone demonstrating, causality, and since many of Christianity's critics in the West today remain metaphysical materialists and therefore also epistemological empiricists, classical apologetics's tacit assumption of causality is likely to meet serious objections from that quarter that cannot be answered adequately without moving to the level of presuppositions, a level deeper than that at which classical apologetics ordinarily conducts its natural theology. Second, classical apologetics, particularly as presented in another textbook for this course,<sup>4</sup> also seems, in its contemporary version, to have incorporated into its definition a blanket rejection of presuppositional apologetics, a rejection that mistakenly views all presuppositional apologetics as Van Tilian and therefore fails to recognize the distinction between classical and Van Tilian presuppositionalism. When this rejection of presuppositionalism drives classical apologist Sproul, as Dr. Kilpatrick mentioned in an earlier lecture, to the point of insisting that his own embrace of, e.g., innate ideas (like logic) is an embrace of “protosuppositions” rather than presuppositions, and it appears impossible to distinguish Sproul's “protosuppositions” from anyone else's presuppositions, then it becomes apparent that in this (though not every) regard classical apologetics's antagonism to presuppositionalism is mere logo-

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<sup>4</sup>R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

machy (dispute about words) and stands in need of a candid reassessment of the competing ideas.

## B. Evidential apologetics

Evidential apologetics, as Cowan introduces it, “has much in common with the classical method except” that it “may be characterized as a ‘one-step’ approach.” That is, while classical apologists insist that a logically valid apologetic must address the existence of God before arguing for miracles, evidentialists think miracles “can serve as one sort of evidence for the existence of God.”<sup>5</sup> For example, an evidentialist might argue that historical evidence proves the resurrection of Christ—at least as much as historical evidence can prove many things nonbelievers routinely affirm—and that the resurrection, as a supernatural event, “indicates”<sup>6</sup> the existence of God. (It is not quite clear what evidentialists might mean by *indicates*. It does not appear that they mean that it is a premise in a logical syllogism in which the truth of God’s existence is a valid inference from the premises. It seems to denote something less logically compelling.) Some prominent modern adherents of evidentialism are John Warwick Montgomery, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Gary Habermas. (I hesitate to include Clark Pinnock in the list because of his defection from orthodox Christian theism by the embrace of open theism.) Likewise, some of the early church fathers, like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, employed evidences in their apologetics, although it would be anachronistic to call them evidentialists, with all the baggage that term carries in contemporary apologetic controversies.

**Evidentialism has one great strength:** it actually brings evidence to bear on the claims of the gospel, and it presents that evidence against contrary claims. When nonbelievers assert that there is no good reason to believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, evidentialists like Habermas can trot out evidence that would be more than sufficient to persuade the unbiased historian of any other historical claim. Habermas is particularly adept at this. It is no exaggeration to say that he made a fool of one of the world’s leading skeptics, the respected philosopher Antony Flew, in their debate over the resurrection.<sup>7</sup> When trying to persuade people whose presuppositions do not already set them against the evidence, evidentialists can be very persuasive indeed. However, I would hasten to add that **evidentialists’ persuasiveness often depends on popular ignorance of logic.** To be specific, when evidentialists purport to prove the general reliability of the Bible by means of historical evidence, they are committing the inductive fallacy: attempting to derive a general conclusion from particular premises. There is simply no logically valid way to infer from “The Bible is right about x, y, and z” to “The Bible is right about everything” or even to “The Bible is a generally reliable historical document.” **The proper role of historical evidences is not to establish general truths but to refute objections to the Bible.** It is, in the language of some apologists, a defeater of defeaters. When the Christian asserts his belief in the Bible and the skeptic replies that he disbelieves the Bible because it is historically inaccurate about *x*, historical evidence properly comes to bear to answer whether indeed the Bible is inaccurate about *x*. But there simply are far more historical assertions in the Bible than we can possibly verify through

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<sup>5</sup>Cowan, *Five Views*, 16; compare, in agreement, Gary R. Habermas, “Evidential Apologetics,” in *Five Views*, ed. Cowan, 92-121, at 92.

<sup>6</sup>Habermas, “Evidential Apologetics,” 92.

<sup>7</sup>See Gary Habermas and Antony Flew, *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*, edited by Terry L. Miethe (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

historical evidence, and even if we could verify one tenth of them (which in my estimation would be generous indeed) we could still not infer therefrom the general reliability of the Bible. How, for instance, shall we verify through historical evidence outside the Bible itself that Bildad told Job, “The light of the wicked indeed goes out, and the flame of his fire does not shine” (Job 18:5)? There were no tape recorders in Job’s day. How shall we verify historically that on the twenty-fourth day of a given month in the time of Nehemiah the children of Israel assembled with dust on their heads (Nehemiah 9:1)? It would be surprising enough to find historical evidence, outside the Bible, for the assembly; but for the dust on the heads? What historical evidence would allow us to verify that Jehoshaphat’s heart took delight in the ways of the LORD (2 Chronicles 17:6), or that the lots cast to determine musicians’ duties in the time of David fell out precisely as recorded in 1 Chronicles 25:9-31, or that the lame man healed miraculously by Peter when he and John went to the temple to pray “held on to Peter and John” (Acts 3:11)? It is one thing to rebut claims of errors in the Bible either by showing that the critics have no evidence for their claims or that there is positive evidence for the points they challenge. That is a proper use of historical evidence. But it is simple logical fallacy to argue from particular instances of historical reliability to general historical reliability.

Another serious **weakness of evidentialists** is their failure to address adequately the presuppositions that prohibit many people from assessing evidences reasonably (that is, in a manner consistent with logic, the Logos). In reading leading evidentialists like Josh McDowell, whose *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict* contain vast hordes of useful evidences and should be in the library of every Christian minister, evangelist, or missionary, one thinks he hears a voice saying, “Look, don’t waste my time arguing about whether any of this is possible, just look at the facts, man!” But of course such a complaint fails to take seriously the effect of presuppositions on people’s ability to consider evidence, that is, to reason properly. Every apologist must conduct his task with a keen eye on the noetic effects of sin. At the very root of those effects is the sin of unbelief. The nonbeliever, the Apostle Paul assures us, knows but suppresses the truth “in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). The nonbeliever’s atheism, or agnosticism, or skepticism is not morally neutral, it is the sin of unbelief, the sin of rejecting the testimony of the one who is Truth itself. Thus his bias against the conclusions supported by an objective, rational reading of the evidences—that is, a reading rooted in faith—will not be overcome by a mere presentation of the evidences. Present them we must, for they are instruments by which the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, leading some through that conviction to repentance and others to a hardening of the heart that makes their unbelief all the more condemnable. But as classical apologists rightly insist, we shall find the evidences of little value if we present them in isolation from arguments that constitute a direct attack on the unbelieving presuppositions that tend to make the nonbeliever immune to them.

I offer you one illustration of how unbelief at the presuppositional level affects the consideration of evidence. (And, believe me, other examples could be multiplied almost without limit.) D. M. S. Watson, one of the leading geneticists of the twentieth century and a staunch defender of Darwinian evolution, wrote nonetheless of evolution as “a theory universally accepted not because it can be proved by logically coherent evidence to be true but because the only

alternative, special creation, is clearly incredible.”<sup>8</sup> Recall that the last word there, *incredible*, means “unbelievable.” What Watson is saying is that, in his judgment, the empirical evidence for evolution is not persuasive, yet he believes in evolution anyway *because* he disbelieves in God. (Whether he would call himself a theist is beside the point. If he finds special creation incredible, then he disbelieves in the only true God, whatever false god he might acknowledge.) For Watson, all the piling up of additional evidences against evolution and for special creation is useless. It is useless because Watson’s presuppositions prohibit the interpretation of the evidence that the Christian theist puts on it. The evidentialist apologist will make no headway against the likes of Watson—and they are many—until he first attacks Watson’s presuppositions and shows them false. Having done that, he can and should make use of all kinds of evidences, but he must not naively parade the evidences before ascertaining whether his hearer is capable even of entertaining the possibility of the apologist’s interpretation.

It is tempting to think Watson’s naturalist presupposition is passé, a relic of the materialistic modernism that dominated Western thought through much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but has now given way to postmodernism and the greater spiritual openness of New Age thought., and therefore to infer that the need for addressing presuppositions has diminished with the fall of modernist secularism. But, first, however much New Age thinking might have infiltrated popular culture, it has scarcely touched the dominance of naturalism in the academies of the West. In them, naturalistic presuppositions still reign supreme, especially in the physical and biological (natural) sciences and in the harder of the social sciences: history, economics, law, political science. It is more in the humanities, the softer social sciences (psychology and sociology), and liberal religious studies that New Age thought has made a strong impact in the academy. Contrary to popular opinion, modernism is not dead. Second, the postmodernism of New Age thinking, though it lacks the modernist bias against the supernatural, substitutes a new bias, a bias against objective, absolute, transcendent truth and morality, that makes it equally incapable of putting a Christian theist interpretation on many of the evidences for Christianity. With it, the response to Christian claims is not the blatant denial of modernism but the pacification of relativism. “Oh, sure, go ahead, believe in the resurrection. If that’s truth for you, fine. I don’t need it, but I’m glad it makes you happy. Just don’t force your metanarrative on me. I’ve got my metanarrative, you’ve got yours.” Without attacking the underlying, relativist presuppositions about the nature of truth, the evidentialist will see all his evidence fall on deaf ears when arguing with a postmodernist.

Evidences should be seen for what they are: one category of the apologist’s tool chest. They are legitimate and important when applied to people whose presuppositions permit a reasonable assessment of them. But they are insufficient by themselves to knock down the presuppositional strongholds of unbelief that keep many people from interpreting them rightly. Evidences, yes; evidentialism, no.

### **C. Cumulative case apologetics**

Cumulative case apologetics, as Cowan describes it, sees the case for Christianity not as “in any strict sense a formal argument like a proof or an argument from probability.” It “is more like

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<sup>8</sup>Cited in Henry M. Morris, *Scientific Creationism* (San Diego: Creation Life, 1974), 8.

the brief that a lawyer makes in a court of law or that a literary critic makes for a particular interpretation of a book. It is an informal argument that pieces together several lines or types of data into a sort of hypothesis or theory that comprehensively explains that data and does so better than any alternative hypothesis.”<sup>9</sup> Among its leading adherents have been Basil Mitchell, Paul Feinberg, C. S. Lewis, and C. Stephen Evans.

One important **strength of cumulative case apologetics** is that, because it seeks to address such a wide variety of data, it is perhaps more than other methods visibly **worldviewish**. That is, it is apparent from the start that the cumulative case apologist does not focus narrowly on epistemology, as the presuppositionalist often does; or on metaphysics, as the classical apologist often does; or on history, as the evidentialist often does; or on the psychology of belief, as the Reformed epistemology apologist often does. No, the cumulative case apologist considers a wide variety of data from a wide variety of categories. One could say that while other apologetic methods tend to focus on one of the first two branches of philosophy—epistemology and metaphysics—cumulative case apologetics, without ignoring those, adds serious consideration of the next two branches of philosophy, ethics and aesthetics. This means that cumulative case apologetics addresses the nonbeliever in every sphere of his rebellion: where he denies reality, the apologist presses the case for reality; where he suppresses truth, the apologist upholds it; where he rebels against God’s law or pretends it doesn’t exist, the apologist reminds him that God has set His law in the hearts of men and that it cannot be ignored; where he loves the ugly instead of the beautiful, the apologist unveils the beauty of Christ.

**Another strength of cumulative case apologetics**, closely related to this one, is that it **attends carefully to its audience**. Rather than assuming that the obstacles in the nonbeliever’s road to the cross are those of natural theology or historical evidences—to which the nonbeliever might be simply apathetic—it recognizes that some of those obstacles might be quite other than those typically dealt with by conventional apologetics. Perhaps the nonbeliever despairs because he thinks there is no purpose to life; the apologist can point him toward a number of noble purposes and to the highest end, glorifying God. Perhaps the nonbeliever has been disappointed or deeply injured by others, even by professing Christians; the apologist can help him to recognize the universality of sin, even in himself, the need both to forgive and to be forgiven, and the fulfillment of both needs in knowing Christ. Perhaps the nonbeliever longs for some sense of belonging to something greater than himself; the apologist can explain the age-old conflict between the seed of the serpent and the Seed of the woman and what it means to become a part of the church militant. Perhaps the nonbeliever simply yearns for beautiful truth, for fairy tales come to life; the apologist might point out the fulfillment of many mythical and folktale motifs in the gospel and then help the nonbeliever to recognize that in this case it’s not just myth, it’s reality. (This John Warwick Montgomery did brilliantly in a lecture called “Apologetics for the Tender Minded,” which we intend to play for students in this course.) Such an approach explains partly why the fiction of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien have had a great impact on the thought of many nonbelievers, sometimes being instrumental in their journey to Christian faith.<sup>10</sup> In short, cumulative case

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<sup>9</sup>Cowan, *Five Views*, 18.

<sup>10</sup>See also John Warwick Montgomery, ed., *Myth, Allegory, and Gospel: An Interpretation of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and Charles Williams* (reprint edition: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, and Public Policy, 2000).

apologetics has the strength of holding in its hands a toolbox with a wide variety of tools. It is not forced to see everything as a nail since its only tool is a hammer.

Yet still there are serious **weaknesses in cumulative case apologetics**. While classical and evidential apologetics must frequently face the frustration that an objectively valid and sufficient argument may, because of the nonbeliever's sinful suppression of the truth, be subjectively insufficient, cumulative case apologetics faces the opposite frustration and, indeed, temptation: adopting arguments because they appeal, not because they compel (logically). The strength of the temptation and the ease with which people succumb to it can be observed in common courtroom practice—the very setting for the “lawyer’s brief” approach to which Feinberg and Cowan compare cumulative case apologetics. The lawyers on the opposite sides are far less interested in establishing truth than in persuading a jury, and frequently lawyers’ arguments are guilty of gross logical fallacies, the lawyers either ignorant of the logic themselves or at least confident that the juries will be. The result of applying such an approach to apologetics can be shallow and fleeting persuasions and conversions of convenience. One gets the impression, when reading cumulative case apologetics, that some of its practitioners think, “It doesn’t matter nearly so much whether the argument is valid; what matters is that it works.” Such a capitulation to pragmatism ill fits disciples of the One who is the Way, the *Truth*, and the Life. Further, because cumulative case apologetics belongs, as Cowan points out, “in the same broad family of methods as does the evidential (and perhaps classical) method,” it tends, as much as they do, to give too little attention to underlying presuppositions of unbelief that preclude critics’ facing arguments—of whatever sort, whether of natural theology or history or psychology or aesthetics—squarely. All too often it, like both classical and evidential apologetics, fails to recognize the extent to which its own arguments presuppose the very truths they purport to verify, thus begging the question.

The first three apologetic methods in Cowan’s book, then, despite their several strengths, all fail at significant points. Would that I could say that one of the two remaining methods succeeds without qualification. Sadly, I cannot.

#### **D. Reformed epistemology apologetics**

I should in all candor reveal from the outset that I find Reformed epistemology apologetics personally attractive. Its leading philosophical adherent, Alvin Plantinga, had enormous influence on my philosophical formation in undergraduate school, and I continue to consider his philosophical work of the highest quality. His refinement of Anselm’s ontological argument for the existence of God, for example, I think is logically compelling, even if some people, on encountering it, find it inscrutable.<sup>11</sup> Its close affinity for John Calvin’s approach to man’s knowledge of God in the first chapter of the *Institutes* is another high recommendation, particularly in its insistence on the *sensus divinitatis*. Its willingness to forsake political correctness and polite niceness by calling those who say there is no God fools and hypocrites is refreshing! At last, a school of apologetics that’s not for wimps! Yet for all this, I am unconvinced.

Reformed epistemology apologetics, Cowan says, relying on Kelly James Clark, challenges the

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<sup>11</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), chapter 10.

“evidentialist” (not evidential apologist) epistemological assumption that “if a belief is unsupported by evidence of some kind, it is irrational to believe it. . . . Those who advocate this view hold that it is perfectly reasonable for a person to believe many things without evidence.”<sup>12</sup> Prominent advocates of this method include Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, George Mavrodes, and William Alston. Clark accurately demonstrates the self-refuting nature of W. K. Clifford’s claim “that it is wrong, always and everywhere, for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence,” since in fact the sort of evidence Clifford had in mind was empirical, experiential evidence, from none of which can the normative proposition “it is wrong, always and everywhere, for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence” be derived.<sup>13</sup> But I deny that it is reasonable (never mind whether it is morally right or wrong) to believe things without *any* evidence at all—that is, to believe things willy nilly, on a whim, so to speak. I hardly think that any respectable epistemology would affirm that it’s fine for me to wake up each morning and say, “Okay, today I’m going to believe the next ten crazy ideas I can dream up. Number one: Kelly James Clark is a ten-thousand-year-old Martian who introduced cheddar cheese to earth in 1312 B.C. Number two: There is a randomly formed Milk Dud resting in the bottom of a crater on the far side of the moon. Number three—and so on.” But I really don’t think that’s what the Reformed epistemology apologists mean. What they seem to mean is that it is reasonable to believe *some* things without any *external* evidence. If they are correct—and I think they are—that the *sensus divinitatis* (and more) of which Calvin wrote, that seems so clearly affirmed in Romans 1:19-21, 32, and to which many people of all cultures at all times in human history give testimony, is real, then that inward sense is itself a kind of evidence. It is not the external evidence that modernist, rationalist empiricist philosophers tend to consider the only kind of evidence, but it is evidence nonetheless. But the reasonableness of believing some things without external evidence is, I think, more in the category of knowing than of showing; that is, while I think it is both true and entirely justified that many, maybe most, perhaps even all people come to belief not through compelling arguments but through the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, this does not relieve the apologist of the responsibility to offer reasons, of various appropriate sorts, for his faith. Knowing does not substitute for showing, and the latter is the responsibility of apologetics. Indeed, we have the direct command of Scripture that, even if our belief did not *originate* in arguments, still we must be willing to *defend* it with arguments, that is, to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks us a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). Indeed, Reformed epistemologists like Plantinga seem awfully good at doing just that, despite their insistence that it is rational to believe some things without (external) evidence. One strength of Reformed epistemology apologetics, then, is that it is not nearly so guilty of abdicating the apologetic task as its self-description might at first imply.

Yet an important **weakness of Reformed epistemology apologetics is its embrace of what I can only conclude is a form of environmental determinism.** Kelly Clark writes, “One good apologetic strategy, therefore, is to encourage unbelievers to put themselves in situations where people are typically taken with belief in God: on a mountain, for example, or at the sea, where we see God’s majesty and creative power. We are far more likely to encounter the Creator if we

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<sup>12</sup>Cowan, *Five Views*, 19.

<sup>13</sup>Clark, “Reformed Epistemology Apologetics,” in *Five Views*, ed. Cowan, 268-9.

attend to his creation” Not only does this appear to attribute to one’s environment rather than to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit the capacity to engender faith, but also it ignores the fact that such environmental conditioning for faith is neither necessary nor sufficient. Millions of people live or vacation in the mountains or at the sea who continue stubbornly in their unbelief, and millions have met God without ever spending significant time in what Clark calls God’s “creation” (as if somehow people and cities were not also God’s creation). Alexander Solzhenitsyn met God in the gulag; Whitaker Chambers met Him in his inner-city apartment while looking at his newborn baby’s ear. It would be hard to think of someone who has spent more time staring at God’s creation than Charles Darwin or Jacques Cousteau, but neither of them seems to have met God there. No doubt some people will testify in years to come that they met God while frantically escaping from the World Trade Center towers after the terrorist attacks September 11, 2001, but I don’t know that any Reformed epistemology apologist would recommend to nonbelievers that they purposely insert themselves into the midst of great disasters to increase the likelihood of their meeting God, or to apologists that they replicate such disasters to put nonbelievers into such circumstances in hopes of engendering their conversions. (Perhaps that is the real rationale behind the forced conversions of some past missionary endeavors: the threat of burning at the stake engenders a fear that leads to conversion!) And besides, no doubt others will testify in years to come that whatever wisps of faith they had in God were dashed while they fought frantically to escape from the World Trade Center towers—only to learn that many of their friends failed to escape. The same environment that seems to introduce one person to God seems to estrange another from Him. This can only mean that the environment is neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause of faith. And this should be no surprise to anyone who has read Ephesians 2:8, which tells us that faith is a gift from God—not a gift from Mt. Rainier or the deep blue sea. Further, this faith, which means voluntary assent to an understood proposition, comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Now, this hearing is not simply the physical phenomenon of vibrations in a medium striking the eardrum and being translated into nerve impulses that travel up the auditory nerve to the auditory center of the brain, where synapses in brain cells somehow record them. No, this hearing is *understanding*, and this *understanding* comes from the Word of God. That is, no experience—not gazing on a sunset or watching the twin towers collapse or looking with wonder at a baby’s ear, as Whitaker Chambers did and was converted—no sensation of sight, sound, touch, taste, or smell carries its own interpretation. Sense perception and what we call experience bear meaning only in linguistic context. Even the sight of a uniformed young man gently guiding and helping an elderly lady across a busy street means nothing by itself, for he could as easily be currying favor in hopes of being named in her will, or gaining her confidence so as to gain entry to her home and rob her blind, as altruistically helping a stranger or his own grandmother. The physical world and all the events in it are not self-interpreting, and only language interprets. Only propositions have meaning, and we need interpretation of the events and objects around us from the only One who understands them all from beginning to end in all their relations before we can interpret any of them with confidence. No apologetic method that begins elsewhere than in propositional truths is capable of interpreting the surrounding world and our experiences in it in a manner that actually establishes the truth of any conclusions.

**Another important weakness in Reformed epistemology apologetics**, as Kelly Clark presents it, is pointed out by William Lane Craig in his closing remarks in Cowan’s book. Craig rightly notes the self-refuting character of Clark’s words, “We can provide reasons or evidence that, *for*

*all we can tell*, support our beliefs. But we can't tell if *we* are sufficiently informed or if *our* cognitive faculties are working properly (or, on the other hand, if the nontheist's aren't working properly)," responding, "How can Clark know that 'we can't tell if we are sufficiently informed' if we can't tell if we are sufficiently informed? **Such skepticism about the workings of one's cognitive faculties is self-defeating**, since the skepticism is the result of the working of those faculties."<sup>14</sup>

Almost as an aside I should remark that one other trouble with Reformed epistemology apologetics is its co-opting of the label *Reformed*. The mere fact, if it were a fact, that some (or even all) who practice this method are Reformed would not justify their taking the label to the method; after all, many other Reformed thinkers practice other apologetic methods. It is as irksome to see these brothers asserting some special right to the label *Reformed* for their apologetic method as it is to see Left-wing, socialist, Dutch neo-Dooyeweerdians of Toronto's Institute for Christian Studies appropriating the term *cultural Calvinism* to their particular perspective, as if no non-neo-Dooyeweerdian, nonsocialist, non-Left-wing (and who knows? maybe even non-Dutch!) Calvinists gave a rip about the cultural mandate. But that is a protest about labels, not about substance.

#### **E. Van Tilian presuppositional apologetics**

Due to an ironic ambiguity, Cowan's introduction to presuppositional apologetics begins with a marvelous, unintentional poke at presuppositionalists: "Due to the noetic effects of sin, presuppositionalists usually hold that there is not enough common ground between believers and unbelievers that would allow followers of the prior three methods to accomplish their goals."<sup>15</sup> I presume that what Cowan meant was that presuppositionalists argue that because of the noetic effects of sin believers and unbelievers lack sufficient common epistemological ground for classical and evidential apologetics to achieve their goals. But his words may be taken instead to mean that, because of the noetic effects of sin on them, presuppositionalists deny the sufficiency of common epistemological ground between believers and nonbelievers for classical and evidential apologetics to achieve their goals! That is, taken in its most natural grammatical and syntactical sense, Cowan seems to be charging presuppositionalists with holding their view by suppressing the truth in unrighteousness—precisely what they say all nonbelievers do! No doubt classical apologists will be pleased with that judgment, and presuppositionalists will protest. Ah, the hazards of careless writing!

Cowan was right, however, to say that most presuppositionalists believe that believers and nonbelievers lack sufficient epistemological common ground for nonbelievers to find theistic proofs and historical evidentiary arguments compelling, so long as they remain committed to their presuppositions. Cowan goes on to say that presuppositionalism infers from this that "The apologist must simply presuppose the truth of Christianity as the proper starting point in apologetics."<sup>16</sup> John Frame explains that presuppositionalism holds that "[We] should present the biblical God, not merely as the conclusion to an argument, but as the one who makes argument

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<sup>14</sup>William Lane Craig, "Closing Remarks," in *Five Views*, ed. Cowan, 323.

<sup>15</sup>Cowan, *Five Views*, 18.

<sup>16</sup>Cowan, *Five Views*, 18-19.

possible.”<sup>17</sup> That is, presuppositionalism asserts that every non-Christian thought system functions adequately only insofar as it illegitimately borrows from the epistemological capital of Biblical revelation. Frame points out that Biblical data imply that “for Christians faith governs reasoning.”<sup>18</sup>

Now, before I launch into a more general discussion of this sort of presuppositionalism, let me comment a bit on the **propensity of Van Tilians to write ambiguously**, using just three examples, all taken from Frame’s chapter in your textbook, though many more might be offered. (Note: Cowan, whose ambiguity I pointed out a moment ago, is not alone! But his ambiguity was unimportant to his own apologetic system; that is not the case with the ambiguities I am about to point out.) First, consider Frame’s statement that “[We] should present the biblical God, not merely as the conclusion to an argument, but as the one who makes argument possible.” The apodosis (second half) of the sentence is not properly parallel to the protasis (first half). After reading that we should present God not merely as the conclusion to an argument, we expect to read that we should present Him as the axiom (starting point) of an argument. That is, the first clause focuses on the *parts* of an argument, not the *conditions* for one. But Frame tacitly turns from the parts of an argument to a statement about the conditions under which argument can occur. God is not merely the conclusion of an argument, but “the one who makes argument possible.” Now of course the classical or evidential or cumulative case apologist will agree that had God not existed, or had God existed but never created anything, or had God created only nonrational things or only rational things that never erred, no argument could have taken place (unless of course God argued with Himself—in which case the god that existed would not be the God of the Bible). But that is surely not the point Frame wants to make. Elsewhere he affirms, though with yet more ambiguity, that his system uses circular argument. He writes, e.g.: “If we are to *presuppose* the truth of Christianity in all our thinking, then, how can an argument help to confirm that presupposition? If we presuppose God’s Word is true, then its truth is assured at the beginning of the argument. But if the truth of Christianity is assured already at the beginning of the argument, what can the argument add to that assurance? Here, it seems, *another form of circularity* vitiates the process of reasoning,” and “But are we not still forced to say, ‘God exists (presupposition), therefore God exists (conclusion),’ and isn’t that argument clearly circular? Yes, *in a way*. But that is unavoidable for any system, any worldview. For God is the ultimate standard of meaning, truth, and rationality.”<sup>19</sup> In addition to wondering about the added ambiguity in Frame’s phrases “another form of circularity” and “in a way”—neither of which does he ever define—we might also wonder why, instead of writing the nonparallel sentence “[We] should present the biblical God, not merely as the conclusion to an argument, but as the one who makes argument possible” Frame did not write, “We should present the biblical God, not merely as the conclusion to an argument, but as the major premise as well.” That would balance protasis and apodosis, and it would be precisely what Frame believes. It would be unfair to assume that Frame avoided that clarity because it made the absurdity of his position too obvious, but it is not unfair to notice that the imprecision has the effect of hiding the position’s absurdity, regardless of intent.

Second, one wonders why Frame capitulates to epistemological relativism with the qualifier

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<sup>17</sup>John M. Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” in *Five Views*, ed. Cowan, 208-231, at 220.

<sup>18</sup>Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” 209.

<sup>19</sup>Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” 216, 217.

“for Christians, faith governs reasoning.” Does faith not govern reasoning for non-Christians? Or, is it true for Christians that faith governs everyone’s reasoning, but not true for non-Christians? Certainly Frame believes neither of these. Yet his statement implies one or the other. But presumably this is to be explained as a careless expression. If so, it is one of many that make reading Frame and his mentor, Cornelius Van Til, frustrating.

Third, Frame has an aggravating habit of qualifying what he says but not defining the qualifiers. For instance, he writes over and over again (not only in this essay but also elsewhere) of “human reason” and “human logic”—a habit that he shares with Van Til. “The content of faith, Scripture,” Frame tells us, “may transcend reason in these two senses: (1) it cannot be proved by *human reason* alone; (2) it contains mysteries, even apparent contradictions, that cannot be fully resolved by *human logic*. . . .”<sup>20</sup> But what purpose does that modifier, *human*, serve in these statements? Is there some other reason or logic that is not human? Perhaps Frame means not reason or logic in the abstract but the attempt at reasoning by particular persons—though if that is what he means, we might plead with him to say so. But what is reason or logic other than the way God’s mind thinks? The logic humans use includes the law of contradiction; does Frame have in mind some logic that excludes it, a logic that he would describe as “nonhuman logic”? Would that even be logic? Until Frame specifies the axioms of a nonhuman logic, or of a nonhuman reason, his qualifying *reason* and *logic* with *human* is meaningless. Another instance of this habit of using undefined qualifiers arises in his discussion of circular arguments. Consider first this lengthy excerpt:

But if faith governs reasoning, where does faith come from? Some might think it is essentially irrational, since in one sense it precedes reason. But that conclusion would not be warranted. The question, “Where does faith come from?” may be taken in two senses. (1) It may be asking the *cause* of faith. In that sense, the answer is that God causes faith by his own free grace. This is the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. (2) Or it may be asking the *rational basis* of faith. In that sense, the answer is that faith is based on reality, on truth. It is in accord with all the facts of God’s universe and all the laws of thought that God has ordained. The Holy Spirit does not cause us to believe lies. He is the God of truth, and so he makes us believe what is true, what is in accord with all evidence and logic. The faith he gives us agrees with God’s own perfect rationality.

There is a kind of circularity here, but the circularity is not vicious. It sounds circular to say that faith governs reasoning and also that it is based on rationality. It is therefore important to remember that the rationality that serves as the rational basis for faith is God’s own rationality. The sequence is: God’s rationality → human faith → human reasoning. The arrows may be read ‘is the rational basis for.’ That sequence is linear, not circular.<sup>21</sup>

Now, the truth is that there are all kinds of difficulties with these two paragraphs. First, Frame’s conclusion that the sequence he gives “is linear, not circular,” appears plausible only until we remember that Frame left out the last step in any such apologetic argument. The real conclusion of the argument is not “human reasoning”<sup>22</sup> but “God’s rationality.” That is, the presuppositional

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<sup>20</sup>Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” 210.

<sup>21</sup>Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” 210.

<sup>22</sup>And is “human reasoning” different from “human reason”? And again we must ask whether the modifier means

ist's argument is intended to conclude in God, not in man. But this means that the full sequence is "God's rationality → human faith → human reasoning → God's rationality"—and that sequence is most certainly circular. Second, Frame's response to the critic's complaint that saying faith governs reasoning implies that faith "is essentially irrational, since in one sense<sup>23</sup> it precedes reason" simply fails to meet the critic head on. The response ought instead to be that **there is nothing irrational about faith's preceding reason, that is, about axioms' (premises') preceding inference, since material and process are not the same thing. Reason (process) has nothing with which to work unless there are axioms (material) that precede it.** Third, Frame's discussion assumes without warrant that this faith (whose content he does not specify) is true. If it is not, it is not "based on reality, on truth," it is not "in accord with all the facts of God's universe and all the laws of thought that God has ordained," and it is not in fact caused by the Holy Spirit—or if it is, then the Holy Spirit is not holy. It is precisely these challenges that apologetics must answer, and merely reasserting the opposite is no answer, it is again a *petitio principii*, an argument in a circle. There are more logic problems in them, but my primary purpose in citing these paragraphs was to point out the ambiguity of Frame's conceding that "There is a kind of circularity here, but the circularity is not vicious." The careless reader might think that Frame then goes on to define the "kind of circularity" he has in mind. But aside from denying that it is vicious (that is, that it is logically fallacious)—in which he is simply mistaken—Frame never does say what this "kind of circularity" actually is or how an argument *can* be circular but not vicious. He descends to the same ambiguity when he writes, as I cited once already, "But are we not still forced to say, 'God exists (presupposition), therefore God exists (conclusion),' and isn't that argument clearly circular? Yes, *in a way*. But that is unavoidable for any system, any worldview" and "One cannot argue for an ultimate standard by appealing to a different standard. That would be inconsistent. [para] So there is a kind of circle here. But even this circle, as I indicated earlier, is linear in a sense." Aside from the rather odd claim here that this "kind of circle" is "linear in a sense"—that is, that in some sense some kind of circle can be some kind of straight line—which we may be forgiven for thinking is a violation of the law of contradiction (unless we are prepared to deny all that we know about plane geometry)—aside from this, note the ambiguous language: "Yes, *in a way*"; "a *kind of circle* here"; "linear *in a sense*." These are all, to put it bluntly, weasel words that, if the reader is unwary, serve the purpose of excusing Frame from defining his terms precisely. Frame nowhere defines the way in which "God exists, therefore God exists" is circular but not vicious, or how its circularity differs from the vicious circularity of other systems of thought. To this I might add that Frame's saying that such a circularity (however defined or qualified, and however "linear in a sense") is "unavoidable for any system" does not make it so. Frame thinks so, but only, it appears, because he confuses axioms (first premises) with conclusions. And he can only say that the resulting argument is linear (in whatever sense) because, as I noted above, his logical chain from God's rationality to our faith to our reasoning omits the final (circle-closing) segment: God's rationality.

Enough of pointing out Frame's ambiguities. The exercise could continue *ad nauseam*. My purpose in pursuing it was to alert you to how difficult it can be to know what Frame and other

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anything.

<sup>23</sup>Note the ambiguity here: "in one sense," which is, and which is distinct from what other senses?

Van Tilians mean by some of their most important terms. If the terms by which they construct and explain their overall system are ambiguous, it should be no surprise to find that the system itself is ambiguous or even self-contradictory.

On pages 219-223 of his essay, Frame lists eight “conclusions in regard to apologetic method.” It is not clear in some cases how these are implied in Frame’s previous discussion of presuppositionalism, but let me ignore that. Instead, I wish to consider whether these conclusions are unique to Van Tilian presuppositionalism. (1) The purpose of apologetics is to evoke or strengthen faith. (2) Apologists should augment their apologetic by the testimony of a gracious life. (3) Apologists should present God as He really is, not as He is not. (4) The apologist’s argument should be transcendental—that is, “it should present the biblical God, not merely as the conclusion to an argument, but as the one who makes argument possible . . . as the source of all meaningful communication, since he is the author of all order, truth, beauty, goodness, logical validity, and empirical fact.” It appears by this that Frame means that the apologist should show proponents of other worldviews how their systems of thought ultimately self-refute or depend for whatever validity they do have on an illicit assumption of the Biblical worldview. (5) The apologist should use traditional arguments (e.g., the cosmological argument) for this transcendental conclusion.<sup>24</sup> (6) The apologist should not cater to the critic’s self-asserted autonomy. (7) He should fit the argument to the person. (8) He should show how error comes from rebellion. It is difficult to see how any of these eight points would not be embraced by classical, evidential, or cumulative case apologists. They do not, therefore, distinguish Frame’s presuppositionalism from other apologetic methods.

So what *is* Frame’s (and Van Til’s) presuppositionalism? What distinguishes it from other methods? I noted above<sup>25</sup> that Frame acknowledges a significant difference between his and Van Til’s presuppositionalism. He writes “that (contrary to Van Til) I see considerable common ground between presuppositional apologetics and the other schools of thought represented in this volume. . . . Or, to put the issue in another way: the presuppositionalism I formulate is not clearly distinct from the other methodologies.”<sup>26</sup> I can only applaud Frame for that. But then one is left wondering what remains of his presuppositionalism. It is awfully difficult to imagine that the sometimes strident controversies in the Reformed world for the last half century over presuppositionalism have been nothing but a mistake of definition and that there really is no significant difference between presuppositionalism and the other methods. No, **there remain two**

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<sup>24</sup>Frame concedes in footnote 18 (on pages 220-221) that his “concept of transcendental argument differs somewhat from that of Van Til and other presuppositionalists” in this respect and adds, “In my view, presuppositionalism should not be seen as the *antithesis* of ‘classical’ or ‘traditional’ or ‘evidential’ apologetics, but as a Christian epistemology that seeks to supplement, clarify, and sharpen the traditional approaches with biblical teachings that are at least sometimes overlooked, or even contradicted, in the tradition.” It will become clear below that I have a similar understanding of the relationship between what I’m calling “classical presuppositionalism” and the other apologetic approaches, but this should not be thought to imply that my classical presuppositionalism and Frame’s modified Van Tilian presuppositionalism are identical. Mine acknowledges the invalidity of all circular reasoning, while Frame’s insists that some circular reasoning is valid; mine adheres strictly to the laws of logic, including the law of contradiction, while Frame’s and Van Til’s treat the laws of logic, including the law of contradiction, as “mere” “human” logic and therefore dispensable when they become inconvenient.

<sup>25</sup>See the previous footnote.

<sup>26</sup>Frame, “A Presuppositionalist’s Closing Remarks,” in Cowan, *Five Views*, 350-63, at 357-8.

points at which Frame's presuppositionalism differs from the other methods in Cowan's volume: (a) his insistence that his (and all) arguments are, and necessarily are, ultimately circular, and that circularity is not always vicious, and (b) his frequent failure to define his terms adequately. In short, it seems that the defining marks of Frame's presuppositionalism (and in them Frame accurately reproduces Van Tilian presuppositionalism) are circularity and a disdain for logic. Those are not high recommendations.

#### F. Classical presuppositional apologetics

The failure of Van Tilian apologetics (whether original or as refined by Frame) does not entail the failure of all presuppositionalism. There is, as I have suggested repeatedly, another sort of presuppositionalism. Because the unqualified term *presuppositional apologetics* has come to be associated almost exclusively with the Van Tilian tradition, and for lack of any better name, I have chosen to call this *classical presuppositional apologetics*.

The term *presuppositional* differentiates this system from any that fail to address adequately various issues at the level of presupposition that can stand in the way of nonbelievers' reasonably evaluating believers' apologetic arguments. Thus, for example, while evidentialism may neglect to attack metaphysical or methodological naturalism, each of which is a presupposition of modernist secularism and prevents the secularist from taking historical evidence for miracles seriously, classical presuppositionalism will refute naturalism by demonstrating its self-refuting character by means, e.g., of an argument like C. S. Lewis's, in his book *Miracles*, that naturalism undermines rationality and amounts to an argument that there is no such thing as argument. In this respect, classical presuppositional apologetics greatly resembles classical apologetics, for that method, too, will gladly argue the self-refuting nature of other worldviews. However, classical presuppositionalism and classical apologetics are not identical. Classical presuppositionalism does presuppose—that is, treat as axiomatic—the truths of Scripture, and this classical apologetics does not do. While classical apologetics acknowledges some presuppositions (essentially, the laws of logic), it refuses to list Scripture itself as a presupposition. It does this, I think, in the mistaken belief that doing so will necessitate the circularity of Van Tilian presuppositionalism. But it need not. For there is, as I shall argue later, a way to treat Scripture as axiomatic that does not lead to circular argument, even when defending the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

The term *classical* serves to differentiate classical presuppositionalism from Van Tilian presuppositionalism. Classical presuppositionalism rejects circular argument as fallacious and affirms the universal truth and application of the laws of logic, with particular emphasis on the law of contradiction. Unlike Van Tilian presuppositionalism, classical presuppositionalism will not argue, "God exists, therefore God exists." It will not argue, "The Bible is the Word of God, therefore the Bible is the Word of God." Those are circular arguments. They fail to recognize that an axiom by definition cannot be the conclusion of any argument. Indeed, by treating the same statement as both axiom and conclusion, they violate the law of contradiction, and it is precisely this contradiction that makes every circular argument fallacious. Every circular argument calls one premise of an argument the conclusion of the same argument, but by definition conclusion and premise are not the same. Every circular argument therefore violates the law of contradiction. (It is therefore fitting that Van Til was so willing to reject the law of contradiction as need arose.) Also unlike Van Tilian presuppositionalism, classical presuppositionalism will not use the pejorative modifiers *mere* and *human* with *logic* and *reason*. Instead, classical presuppositionalism

affirms that logic, or reason (terms it considers synonymous), is simply the structure of God's thought and is also the paradigm for all right human thought, since the Logos who was in the beginning with God and was God is also the Light that lightens every man who comes into the world (John 1:9), i.e., since man is the image of God (1 Corinthians 11:7). Classical presuppositionalism can also use theistic proofs and historical and other evidences as part of its apologetic arsenal.

In short, **classical presuppositionalism is an apologetic method that (a) asserts Scripture (which includes the laws of logic) as axiomatic,<sup>27</sup> (b) attacks competing worldviews and propositions at the presuppositional level where appropriate, and (c) defends logic and Scripture (and thus the whole of the Christian faith) against attacks by using noncircular arguments that include some theistic proofs and evidential arguments.** Because the specific definition of this view arises in the context of modern debates, it would be anachronistic to ascribe it directly to premodern thinkers. However, it is generally true that all those who tended to see reason as dependent on faith, who would say, *Credo ut intelligam* ("I believe in order to understand"), are representative of this view.<sup>28</sup> The most important among them was St. Augustine, and perhaps the most important statement of his thought in this regard was his *De Magistro* (*Of the Teacher*), in which he argued that **God's imparting logos to man as His image and enabling him thereby to recognize His voice in revelation was essential to all knowledge.** Leading modern adherents of this view have been Gordon H. Clark, Carl F. H. Henry, Ronald H. Nash, John Robbins, and Robert L. Reymond. Clark's is the name most commonly associated with it, although, sad to say, his views often are lumped together with Van Til's.

What are the **strengths of classical presuppositionalism** compared with the four nonpresuppositional views presented in Cowan's book? First, as opposed at least to evidentialism and cumulative case apologetics, and sometimes also classical apologetics, it avoids the mistake of arguing with opponents without first ascertaining what, if any, common ground (presuppositions) we share with them and thus wasting time making arguments that the critics' presuppositions rule out *a priori*. Second, it avoids the subjectivism and environmental determinism that, I have argued, characterize the Reformed epistemological apologetic. Third, it is fully committed to the axiomatic status of Scripture (the Word of God) and logic (which, because inherent in Scripture, is also the Word of God—or perhaps we should prefer to call it the structure of God's thought).

What are the **weaknesses of classical presuppositionalism**? First, it is likely to be mistaken for Van Tilian presuppositionalism and therefore to be saddled with all the weaknesses of that view, as happens, for example, in Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley's *Classical Apologetics*. When that

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<sup>27</sup>Note that asserting logic and Scripture as axiomatic does not entail making logic an external criterion higher than Scripture. Logic is inherent in Scripture from beginning to end—literally. The first word in the Hebrew Bible, *bereshith*, translated "In the beginning," does not simultaneously mean "In the end" or "Pink elephants fly over Los Angeles with green cherries in their navels" or anything other than "In the beginning." This is the law of contradiction in action. The last word of the Bible, "Amen," means "So be it" or "Yes." It does not mean "I'll gladly pay you Wednesday for a hamburger on Tuesday" or "Circular triangles slurp dimpled chads for refreshment" or anything other than "Yes" or "So be it." This, too, is the law of contradiction in action. The Bible's frequent explicit statements of antithesis are only the most obvious ways in which it affirms the laws of logic.

<sup>28</sup>I might qualify this by saying that only those who would say *Credo ut intelligam* but were not Van Tilians were properly representative of this view, but to do so would be as anachronistic—since nobody at the time held Van Til's position—as to call anyone at the time a classical presuppositionalist.

happens, classical presuppositionalism tends not to get the opportunity to set forth its case at all. Second, some of its lesser practitioners have both defined and defended it poorly, giving credence to the propensity of some of its critics to confuse it with Van Tilian presuppositionalism.<sup>29</sup> Third, despite its objective cogency (by criteria of logic), it tends to be subjectively unsatisfying (that is, unpersuasive) to people who have grown up accustomed to common modernist epistemologies such as autonomous rationalism, empiricism, and existentialism. Its commitment to Scripture as axiomatic offends the autonomous impulse in all modernist epistemologies. It rejects empiricism (though not empirical arguments when properly limited in their objectives), and its commitment to logic offends existentialists' exaltation of emotion and experience over reason.

Nonetheless, its strengths outweigh its weaknesses, and the excess of its strengths over its weaknesses is greater than is that of the strengths over the weaknesses of classical apologetics, the next-best alternative.

Before proceeding to a lengthy application of this apologetic method, consider a more concise application to the specific question of Biblical inspiration and authority. In chapter one of *God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics*, Clark sets forth the following argument for believing that the Bible is true and God-breathed:

1. The Bible claims to be God-breathed.
2. All explanations of the claim other than its truth are untenable.
3. All attempts to refute the claim by pointing to specific errors in the Bible fail.
4. Therefore we are justified in believing that the Bible is true and God-breathed.

Consider the argument piece by piece.

First, the Bible claims to be God-breathed. To note this is not to argue in a circle; it is merely to set aside the hypothetical objection that we are claiming for the Bible what it does not claim for itself. It would after all be rather gratuitous to claim that the Bible was the Word of God if it did not claim to be. "There is no reason for making assertions beyond those that can validly be inferred from the statements of the Bible," Clark writes. ". . . What the Bible claims about itself is an essential part of the argument. The Christian is well within the boundaries of logic to insist that the first reason for believing in the inspiration of the Bible is that it makes this claim." Clark cites, among other passages that (explicitly or implicitly) make this claim, 2 Timothy 3:16, John 10:35, 2 Peter 1:20, 21, Romans 3:2, Matthew 11:9-15, Romans 16:25-27, and Ephesians 3:4-5.

Second, all explanations of the claim other than its truth are untenable. Consider three possible alternative explanations. One is that the claim is only occasional and accidental and therefore should not be taken seriously. But a careful inspection of the Biblical data, e.g., as done by Louis Gaussen in his *Theopneustia* (published in translation as *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible*) or by Benjamin B. Warfield in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, demonstrates that the claim is pervasive and crucial to much of the rest of the program of Scripture. It is therefore not accidental and cannot be trivialized or ignored. A second is that the claim is one among many by writers whose other claims provide good grounds for skepticism about their credibility, and therefore the claim lacks *a priori* credibility. Yet a careful examination of the writings indicates the opposite: that the writers were highly credible on other matters and made this claim in complete awareness of what they were saying, and therefore that the claim's falsehood is unlikely

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<sup>29</sup>An example is *some* of the argument in Kenneth Gary Talbot's series of taped lectures on apologetics.

*a priori*. A third is that though some other Bible characters might have made the claim, either Jesus did not make it or, if He did, He made it only in accommodation to the prevailing views of his contemporaries, and since Jesus is the most important character in the Bible, His failure to make the claim renders the claim unlikely. But again, careful inspection of the data indicate that Jesus did make the claim, that He did not do it merely as an accommodation to His contemporaries' prevailing views (Indeed, He was quite in the habit of contradicting prevailing views that He considered wrong!), and that He made the claim in full self-awareness. Therefore, if the claim is false, it becomes an evidence against Jesus' credibility. Yet Jesus' credibility is otherwise impeccable. Therefore Jesus' credibility gives His claim *a priori* credibility. Perhaps there are other alternative explanations that need examination, and in the appropriate context that could be done. But for the sake of illustrating the method, the consideration of these three is sufficient. If there are four and only four possible explanations of a phenomenon (in this case a claim), and if three of them can be shown untenable, then it follows that the fourth is to be affirmed. Thus, it follows from the failure of alternative explanations of the Bible's claim to be the Word of God that the Bible is in fact what it claims to be: the Word of God.

Third, all attempts to refute the claim by pointing to specific errors in the Bible fail. A study of individual examples of alleged contradictions in the Bible, such as John W. Haley's *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, demonstrates that none of the allegations proves true. Similarly, a study of individual examples of alleged historical inaccuracies in the Bible, such as we find in Gleason Archer's *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, demonstrates that none of those allegations proves true. **The harmony of all the parts of Scripture—its total consistency with itself—is the most important phenomenal evidence of the truth, and consequently the inspiration (since the Bible claims its inspiration), of Scripture.**

Fourth, therefore we are justified in believing that the Bible is true and God-breathed. This follows from the first three premises, and **the argument is noncircular.**

It may be helpful at this point to contemplate Clark's explanation of why he prefers this sort of argument for the inspiration and authority of Scripture to arguments of a more evidentialist or classical apologist nature:

. . . the attempt to show the Bible's logical consistency is, I believe, the best method of defending inspiration. But because it is so intricate and difficult, one naturally wonders about an easier method. Here again we must **consider the nature and limits of 'proof.'** **Demonstrative proof, such as occurs in geometry, depends on unproved axioms.** However valid the demonstration may be, if two people do not accept the same axioms, they will not be convinced by the same proof. **Is there then any proposition which the believer and the unbeliever will both accept without proof?** In times past there have been areas of agreement [e.g., that God exists; or the truthfulness of Scripture; or the goodness of Jesus' moral standards]. But today [all such ideas are contested]. **The more consistent unbelief is, the less can agreement be obtained.** So long as the unbeliever is inconsistent, we can force him to make a choice. If he inconsistently admires Jesus Christ or values the Bible, while at the same time he denies plenary and verbal inspiration, we can by logic insist that he accept both—or neither. But **we cannot by logic prevent him from choosing neither and denying a common premise. It follows that in logical theory there is no proposition on which a consistent believer and a consistent unbeliever can agree.**

Therefore the doctrine of inspiration, like every other Christian doctrine, cannot be

demonstrated to the satisfaction of a clear thinking unbeliever. If, nonetheless, it can be shown that the Bible, in spite of having been written by more than thirty-five authors over a period of fifteen hundred years, is logically consistent, then the unbeliever would have to regard it as a most remarkable accident. It seems more likely that a single superintending mind could produce this result than that it just happened accidentally. **Logical consistency therefore is evidence of inspiration; but it is not demonstration.**<sup>30</sup> Strange accidents do indeed occur, and no proof is forthcoming that the Bible is not such an accident. Unlikely perhaps, but still possible.

Before jumping to conclusions, consider carefully first what **Clark is not saying**. (1) He is not saying **that we should not bother with “common ground” arguments** where we can use them. If an unbeliever believes (as does a Jehovah’s Witness) that the Bible is the Word of God, then it is appropriate to cite the Bible as authoritative in an argument over, e.g., the Trinity or the atonement or the expectation of the saints’ bodily resurrections. If he believes that certain criteria of historical judgment are reliable, then it is appropriate to demonstrate to him that the consistent application of those criteria will yield conclusions consistent with the Christian faith but inconsistent with his rejection of it. (2) **He is not saying that we should ignore historical evidence** for the truthfulness of the Bible. But he would remind us that particular premises—which are the most that can be established by historical evidence—cannot validly yield universal conclusions, and that therefore the proper use of historical evidence is not to prove that the Bible is the Word of God but to disprove allegations of errors in it. (3) **He is not saying that we should not argue from fulfilled prophecy for the inspiration and truthfulness of the Bible.** Indeed, fulfilled prophecy is an example of the logical consistency of the whole Bible. If the Bible contained prophecies that went finally unfulfilled (and we could know of some such because their time horizons have expired), that would entail internal contradiction in the Bible and would be inconsistent with its self-description as the Word of God. But fulfilled prophecies illustrate the Bible’s consistency. (4) **He is not saying that we should not bother to argue with unbelievers.** (5) **He is not saying that we should not bother to point out unbelievers’ inconsistencies to them.** (6) **He is not saying that all we need to do in response to objections to the Bible’s inspiration and inerrancy is to recommend that the critic read the Bible—or begin reading it aloud to him.** Some have represented Clark thus. His point instead is that a careful reading of the text will reveal its internal consistency. If “the consent of all the parts” is, as the *Westminster Confession* says, one of the phenomena that might move us to a high and reverent esteem for Scripture, then it stands to reason that the more familiar the critic becomes with the text of the Bible, the more likely he is to recognize and be impressed by its amazing consistency. (Here the classical presuppositionalist could take a page from the Reformed epistemology apologist. The latter wants to put nonbelievers in circumstances that tend to engender faith. The classical presuppositionalist would agree: put them in the circumstance of gaining great familiarity with the Bible.)

If he is *not* saying all those things, what *is* Clark saying? He is saying that **logical demonstration, being possible only on the basis of commonly accepted axioms, is not possible with regard to Biblical inspiration when we are arguing with someone with whom we have no**

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<sup>30</sup>It *is* demonstration *vis a vis* its presuppositions, that is, granted the truth of its axioms, but since the *consistent* unbeliever rejects one or more of the axioms, it is *not* demonstration to him.

**common axioms.**

It might also be helpful to contrast Clark's argument for the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture with one by the classical apologist R. C. Sproul. In his chapter "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis" in *God's Inerrant Word*, edited by John Warwick Montgomery, Sproul sets forth the following argument, to each step of which I shall suggest Clark's likely response:

1. The Bible is a basically reliable and trustworthy document. Clark would agree both with this statement and with Sproul's insistence that we ought to give evidence for it. He would warn, however, that there are highly consistent unbelievers who will deny the truth of any axioms we might offer on which to base our arguments for the reliability of the Bible and who therefore will be impervious to our arguments. The fault will not be in the arguments but in the unbelievers.

2. On the basis of this reliable document we have sufficient evidence to believe confidently that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Clark would agree both with this statement and with the varieties of evidences (quotations from the Bible) Sproul would offer from Scripture for it. However, he would also point out that "sufficient evidence to believe confidently" and logical demonstration are not identical, and that the former does not attain to the same level of epistemic certitude as the latter.

3. Jesus Christ being the Son of God is an infallible authority. Clark would agree with the statement and with the Biblical and philosophical evidence for it. He would, however, remind us that since the evidence for the first and second premises was only probabilistic, this conclusion is only probabilistic as well. No argument containing one or more probabilistic premises can validly yield an absolute conclusion. There is nothing inherently wrong with probabilistic arguments; we make most of our choices, including life-and-death choices, on the basis of them. But they should not be confused with demonstrative proofs.

4. Jesus Christ teaches that the Bible is more than generally trustworthy: it is the very Word of God. Clark would agree with both the statement and Sproul's method of proving it from Biblical quotations. Again, however, he would remind us that the probabilistic premises earlier in the argument yield this conclusion/premise no more than probabilistic as well.

5. The Word, in that it comes from God, is utterly trustworthy. Clark would agree with both the statement and the Biblical and philosophical evidence offered for it. Yet he would make the same reminder again.

6. Conclusion: On the basis of the infallible authority of Jesus Christ, the Church believes the Bible to be utterly trustworthy, i.e., infallible. Clark would agree, but he would (a) remind us once again that the earlier probabilistic premises render this conclusion no more than probabilistic, and (b) perhaps also point out that the aim of the argument has not been to discover what the Church believes (which might have been discovered without reference to the Biblical text or the testimony of Christ but only to the Church's creeds and confessions) but to prove that the Church's belief is true.

Some general comments may also be made on Sproul's case for inerrancy. First, the whole chain is no stronger than its weakest link. If the best we have is relative probability, not certitude, for any *one* of the premises, then the best we have for the conclusion is also only relative probability, not certitude. To recognize this is not to condemn the argument. It is simply to point out its limited yield. Second, if, on the one hand, our aim was to provide for ourselves "absolute proof," that is, logical demonstration, then this argument fails. But, third, if, on the other hand,

our aim was to demonstrate to the unbeliever that consistency on his part would require him either to be more skeptical about practically everything else he believes than he is about the Bible (because, even based on his own assumptions, the evidence for the Bible is stronger than that for practically everything else he believes), or to embrace the Bible with as much confidence as he embraces the propositions of which he has the greatest confidence other than those that are matters of analytical necessity (e.g., the theorems of mathematics and geometry), then this argument is valid in form. However, fourth, that does not mean that the argument will be successful in practice. Because of the noetic effects of sin (the unbeliever suppresses the truth in unrighteousness), objective reasonableness and subjective persuasiveness are not identical. We shall never cease to encounter unbelievers who, confronted with the unavoidable choice between retaining the vast majority of their beliefs while adding to them belief in the Bible, on the one hand, and abandoning the vast majority of their beliefs while retaining their rejection of the Bible, on the other hand, will choose a little of each: retaining both their rejection of the Bible and their continuance in the vast majority of their beliefs. People do irrational, inconsistent things all the time, and we should not be surprised when they do so.

My own conclusion with regard to an apologetic for the inspiration and authority of the Bible, therefore, is precisely that of the *Westminster Confession*, chapter 1, paragraph 5:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, **our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.**

Note that this permits us to use arguments from authority (the testimony of the Church); from the internal characteristics of Scripture; from the suitability of Scripture to man's most essential need; even (tacitly) from historical corroboration, for the truthfulness and inspiration of Scripture. Note also, however, that it reserves final persuasion and assurance to the work of the Holy Spirit alone "bearing witness by and with the Word." (Remember the distinction between knowing and showing.) And consider finally the reason it does so: because the *Confession* takes seriously the noetic effects of sin, which make logically valid and empirically plausible arguments useless in the face of the sinner's determination to "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." What is needed in the face of this sinful propensity is not, in the final analysis, more logic or evidence (though these may be helpful tools by which the Spirit may work to convince a man of his sin of suppressing the truth), but the regenerating and converting work of the Spirit of God.

## **II. Classical presuppositional apologetics: a broader example by Gordon H. Clark**

In several of his books, Clark offers examples of classical presuppositionalism at work. Two such works are his *Introduction to Christian Philosophy* and *A Christian View of Men and Things*. A third, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, will serve as an example here. In it, Clark considers the proper relationship between faith and reason and responds to challenges to the Christian faith along three lines (language, ethics, and the problem of evil).

### A. How do faith and reason relate?

There are four possible ways in which faith and reason may be related—and only four. First, reason may be foundational to faith. Second, reason may stand without faith. Third, faith may stand without reason. Fourth, faith may be foundational to reason. There are no other logically possible relations. Clark argues in chapter two of *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* that the first three are untenable and that, therefore, by process of elimination, the fourth must be affirmed. Let us consider, then, his arguments.

**First, is reason foundational to faith?** A variety of arguments have sought to establish that it is. While it would be possible to critique all of them, it is not necessary merely for the sake of illustration. Rather, Clark focuses on one of the most common examples, the **cosmological argument for the existence of God**. This argument, according to its proponents, demonstrates the existence of God by inferences from our experience of the cosmos, the physical order surrounding us. However, Clark argues, “the cosmological argument . . . is invalid . . . a fallacy. It is not possible to begin with sensory experience and proceed by the formal laws of logic to God’s existence as a conclusion.”<sup>31</sup> Clark raises several reasons why the cosmological argument is invalid. (1) “It includes a theory of motion which asserts that nothing can move itself. This thesis rests on the [Aristotelian] concepts of potentiality and actuality.”<sup>32</sup> But “the concepts of potentiality and actuality remain undefined.” An argument that depends on undefined concepts cannot be valid. (2) “In his attempt to conclude with a first Unmoved Mover, Thomas argues that the series of things moved by other things in motion cannot regress to infinity. The reason . . . is that this view would rule out a first mover. But this . . . is essentially the conclusion he wishes to prove.” The argument therefore is circular.<sup>33</sup> (3) “The argument taken at its full face value would prove the existence merely of some cause of physical motion [and not of the cause of anything nonphysical]; one might even say that it could prove the existence only of some physical cause of motion [and not the nonphysical God of theism]. To avoid this, Aristotle goes to some trouble to prove that the Unmoved Mover has no magnitude; but this is one of the most unsatisfactory parts of his argument. At any rate it is quite clear that the Unmoved Mover of the proof has no qualities of transcendent personality.” Therefore it is not the God Thomas seeks to prove.<sup>34</sup> (4) **“Thomas’s argument is invalid because one of its chief terms is used in two senses. . . . Unfortunately, Thomas very clearly argues in other places that no term when applied to God can have precisely the same meaning it has when applied to men or things. . . .”** The argument applies terms like *exist* and *cause* to *created things* in the premises that it then applies to *God* in the conclusion. **“But if a term is not used univocally throughout the syllogism, if a term does not bear precisely the same**

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<sup>31</sup>Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (Jefferson, MD [now Unicoi, TN]: Trinity Foundation, 1986), 35.

<sup>32</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 36.

<sup>33</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 36-7. A possible escape from the circularity of this argument arises in the Kalam cosmological argument, which depends in part on an argument that while an abstract, theoretical infinite series is possible, an actual infinite series is impossible because it would imply self-contradiction. This modification of the cosmological argument might deliver it from this particular criticism, but not from others, and philosophers continue to debate whether the Kalam argument is valid. See in Cowan, *Five Views*, 48-51, 50-51n.27, 57, 67, 81, 86, 133n.2, 176, 315-16, 319-22, 327, 354, 360.

<sup>34</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 37-8.

meaning, the syllogism is invalid. The rules of logic have been violated.”<sup>35</sup> If Clark’s arguments are correct, or if even one of them is, then the cosmological argument appears not to provide convincing ground in reason for faith.

Clark continues his critique of the cosmological argument by reference to David Hume’s objections to it. “Hume’s rejection of natural theology,” he writes, “depends chiefly on two points. The first point is this: if it is valid to conclude the existence of a cause from observation of its effects, it is nevertheless a violation of reason to ascribe to that cause any properties beyond those necessary for the effect.” But this means that “the cosmological argument, if otherwise sound, might give us a God sufficiently powerful to be the cause of what we have observed; but no more,” and “that . . . is not the omnipotent creator described in the Bible.”<sup>36</sup> “What is worse, the argument is not otherwise sound.” Clark continues,

Paley’s famous analogy assumes that the universe is a machine like a watch, and hence needs a watchmaker; but Hume questions the analogy. Is the universe a machine? In many natural processes the universe resembles an organism more than a machine. And if the universe is an organism in spontaneous movement, the analogy of a divine watchmaker falls away. The objection may be stated in still more general terms. Whether the universe is a machine or a living organism, the cosmological argument assumes that it is an effect. As an effect it needs a cause. But how can it be shown that the world is an effect? Of course there are causes and effects within the universe. . . . The cosmological argument, however, requires that the universe as a whole be an effect. But no observation of parts of the universe can give this necessary assumption. To be quite clear about it, no one has ever seen the universe as a whole.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, even if the cosmological argument proved an infinite, eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent God, it “totally fails to prove the existence of a just and merciful God. . . . As a recourse for Christian theism, therefore, the cosmological argument is worse than useless. In fact, Christians can be pleased at its failure, for if it were valid, it would prove a conclusion inconsistent with Christianity.”<sup>38</sup> At this point I disagree with Clark. The cosmological argument may not prove that God is just and merciful, but neither does it prove that He is not; if it proves the existence of God as Creator, it proves something that Scripture tells us about God—not something contrary to what Scripture tells us about God. An argument is hardly to be faulted for not yielding the whole of the Christian faith all by itself. If it yields a part of it, that is enough to commend it.

Whether one finds all of Clark’s arguments convincing or not is not the point just now. The point is to illustrate the classical presuppositional method as used by one of its practitioners. In this case, Clark has demonstrated—to his own satisfaction, anyway—that the first of the four possible relationships between faith and reason—namely, reason as foundational for faith—is untenable. His aim is to demonstrate that two others—reason independent of faith, and faith independent of reason—are also untenable. If he can do that, then by process of elimination the remaining relationship—faith as foundational for reason—is to be affirmed.

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<sup>35</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 38-9.

<sup>36</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 39-40.

<sup>37</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 40.

<sup>38</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 41.

Second, then, **is reason independent of faith?** Can we have reason without faith? Again, many thinkers have tried to argue for this position in a variety of ways, but while it is both possible and desirable to respond to all of them in some contexts, for our purposes a few illustrations will suffice.

**One way of asserting reason as independent of faith is rationalism, rooted in the thought of René Descartes.** Descartes sought to find an escape from total pessimism in reason isolated from any faith. He found that he could doubt anything but that he was doubting, and therefore that he was thinking, and therefore that he was. The famous statement, *Cogito, ergo sum*, “depends on logic alone. ‘I think’ is a proposition such that, if it is denied, it is proved true. . . . This is not a matter of experience but of logic alone. . . .”

All knowledge, on this rationalistic theory, is to be deduced as the theorems of geometry are deduced from their axioms. No appeal to sensation is permitted. The consistent application of the laws of logic is alone sufficient. Reason therefore bears the meaning of logical consistency. This explains why the rationalists adopted the ontological argument for God’s existence. They needed God’s existence not only to rid themselves of an omnipotent devil [a hypothetical explanation for the universe and all our experience that is not ruled out by the cosmological argument], but, more seriously, to prove the existence of a world. Now, to fit their principles, the argument for God’s existence had to be so construed as to make a denial of his existence self-contradictory. As a person who denies that the interior angles of a triangle equal two right angles simply does not know what the concept of triangle means, so anyone who denies God’s existence simply does not understand the term *God*. Thus God’s existence is proved by logic alone.

But, “When this meaning of reason is coupled with the principle that all knowledge can be deduced by reason alone, it follows that revelation is at best unnecessary.”<sup>39</sup> Descartes did not draw out the implication; Benedict Spinoza did. Spinoza argued “that an historical narrative [which is most of what the Bible is], even if perfectly accurate, is valueless in religion,” since all knowledge by definition may be deduced from logic alone, and the historical narrative therefore can add nothing to real knowledge. “A Christian reply therefore must be directed against the epistemology that underlies Spinoza’s statement. The important question is not whether or not the Bible is true, but whether or not all knowledge is deducible from reason, i.e., by logic alone.”<sup>40</sup> Clark answers that philosophers, secular and Christian alike, have answered this “in the negative.” Kant, among others, thought he refuted the ontological argument. “But even if the ontological argument should be valid, no one has ever succeeded in deducing the precise number of planets, or the actual species of japonica, from the existence of God by logic alone. And if astronomy and botany must progress apart from rationalism, it is inconsistent to demand that religion should be so confined. [para] Rationalism therefore, in the seventeenth century meaning of the term, is a failure.”<sup>41</sup>

This earlier form of rationalism having failed, some resorted to **another form of rationalism, empiricism, in which “reason now means sensation.”** John Locke argued that everything we know we learn by sensation; we are born into the world as blank slates, and every sensation makes a

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<sup>39</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 52.

<sup>40</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 53.

<sup>41</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 53.

mark on the slate. As the marks multiply, they form our knowledge. The most obvious problem with empiricism is that there is no sensation, or set of sensations, that tells us that everything we learn we learn by sensation. The position is therefore self-refuting. But, in addition, Clark asks, “how far will experience take us? Do these inner sensations give any knowledge of external bodies? Can we discover the causes of these impressions?” Various philosophers, including the Anglican Bishop George Berkeley, argued that we could not. “Even if we should suppose that our image had some external cause,” Clark goes on, “we could not know that the image *resembles* [emphasis added] the cause, for we have seen nothing but images. In fact, if the word *image* connotes a similarity to something external, we have no reason to believe that our sensations are images.” Yet that is what Locke and Hume, the leading empiricists, thought them to be.<sup>42</sup> Further, “all alleged knowledge of facts beyond present sensation and the records of our own memory,” Clark points out, “depend [in the empiricist system] on the principle of causality.” But an “examination of experience . . . shows that a knowledge of cause and effect is not to be had” on that basis alone. All that sensation, or experience, can give us is a knowledge of sequence. It cannot deduce cause.<sup>43</sup> Yet the difficulties with empiricism do not end there. Empiricism appeals to what we sense as the source of our knowledge. However,

if it is impossible to know the imperceptible [e.g., cause and effect] by perception, and if it is impossible to know the unperceived [i.e., the thing-in-itself of which our sensation allegedly is an image] by perception, is it even possible to know what we now see?

Granted that there is no evidence in experience of an unexperienced table [as distinct from our sensations, which, according to Locke and Hume, are internal *images* of the table] whose size does not change [as does the image of the size as we move closer to or farther from it], can we have even the image of the table, composed as it is of sensations of color, shape, and hardness?

Here is the difficulty. At any finite time, no matter how short, we experience a multitude of sensations. We see dozens of colors, we may hear two or three sounds, we could smell several odors, and even if we have no tastes at the moment, we always have a number of tactile sensations. From this manifold of sensations we select a few and combine them to make the image of a table. But why is it that we combine the color brown, a somewhat rectangular shape, and the sensation of hardness to make a table, instead of selecting from our many sensations the color pale green, the sound of C sharp, and the smell of freshly baked bread to combine them into the idea of a jobbleycluck?<sup>44</sup>

That is, sensation alone offers no criteria of selection or ordering by which to make sense of the jumbled mass of sensations/images we experience.

Empiricism therefore has blundered fatally. It has surreptitiously inserted at the beginning of the learning process an idea of space [or any other defined thing as distinct from unordered images] which does not exist until after the process has been well nigh completed. Once again, then, the attempt to found knowledge on “reason” [this time, sense perception, not logic] as distinct from revelation has failed.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 55.

<sup>43</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 56.

<sup>44</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 56-7.

<sup>45</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 58.

Immanuel Kant's efforts "to remedy empiricism's defect" by postulating *a priori* categories in the mind, Clark argues, failed—a failure for which Christians should be grateful, since had he succeeded he would have established reason independent of revelation, i.e., reason would be successful without faith. Among other defects in Kant's system is its inability to provide content to the categories without prior sensation, which cannot be interpreted without the prior categories. That is, Kant's *a priori* category epistemology gets involved in a vicious circle from which there is no escape. "A concept without its sensory content is empty," Clark points out. "Similarly empty is the *a priori* notion of space. Unless sensations appear in space, we can have no contact with reality. Knowledge requires the combination of *a priori* forms and a posteriori experience. Either one without the other is not knowledge. . . . If our knowledge is always a combination of form and content, we cannot know the form [the *a priori* categories] without the content [the things in themselves]"—and we cannot know the content without the form. Hence, "Kant has failed to find a basis for physics. He has failed to explain sensation. He has failed to give an intelligible account of the relation of form to content. He has failed to make knowledge possible" apart from revelation.<sup>46</sup>

A third attempt to establish reason without revelation was G. W. F. Hegel's epistemology. To make a very long and complex story short and certainly overly simple, Hegel sought to escape Kant's failure to connect categories (concepts) with the thing-in-itself in the external world by asserting that "on a higher level they are both within consciousness itself." That is, Hegel adopted complete idealism. "Nature, the given, the contributions of sense, are one with mind or spirit." Through his principle of the dialectic, whereby every thought entailed its opposite (since A can only be defined fully if its definition includes the assertion that it is not non-A, and therefore A implies non-A),<sup>47</sup> Hegel thought he found a means by which every idea (and hence everything, since only ideas are real) is the product of thought alone unaided by either revelation or sensation. Despite the real genius of much of Hegel's philosophy and its near triumph in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "since World War I, Hegelianism has become all but extinct. . . . This reversal must be taken as evidence of some philosophic flaw or flaws in Hegel's construction. . . .

One particular point of criticism was singled out by Hegel's immediate followers. If the universe is this system of categories, . . . then clearly all reality can be dialectically deduced and every item must find its clear place in the system. . . . To make good his claims, therefore, Hegel ought to deduce some one individual cow, that very real black and white Holstein in the pasture over yonder.

But this is precisely what Hegel did not and could not do. As Plato never satisfactorily connected his Ideas with individual sense objects, so too, and even all the more so, Hegel

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<sup>46</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 62-3.

<sup>47</sup>Hegel's argument here turns on an ambiguity in what it means to imply, or entail. Ordinarily "A implies B" means that if A is true, B must be true. But Hegel's "A implies non-A" means not that if A is true, non-A must also be true, but that to know what A is we must also know what non-A is. In addition, it is not true that we can only know what A is if we know what non-A is—that is, if we know what all non-A is. If that were true, then we could only know anything if we knew everything. There would, then, be no finite knowledge, only infinite knowledge—there would be no knower but God, the only infinite Knower. Yet to affirm—that is, to assert that we know—that only God knows anything is self-refuting.

could not rationally deduce an individual object from the Absolute.

. . . . With respect to zoology Hegel admits with commendable candor that the deduction not only fails to reach the individuals but even fails to reach some sub-species. The concept *animal* might perhaps be deduced, and even the species *cow*; but not Holstein-Friesian, let alone Pieterje van Rijn III.<sup>48</sup>

A further criticism of Hegel's epistemology was that it required us to know everything if we were to know anything. For Hegel nothing could be known except in relationship to everything else. But of course such omniscience is not available to us. But if to know anything we must know everything, and if we do not know everything, then it follows that we know nothing—which to affirm is to deny.<sup>49</sup>

Clark concludes,

The rationalism of the seventeenth century, British empiricism, the critical philosophy of Kant, and now Hegelianism have all tried and have failed to justify knowledge. Reason apart from revelation has come to grief. The only remaining possibility of escaping revelation now is to abandon reason.<sup>50</sup>

Third, then, **is faith independent of reason?** Clark discusses the epistemological failures of early mysticism, e.g., as set forth by the Christian Neoplatonist Dionysius the Areopagite, and later mysticism. For our purposes it is not necessary to go into the details of that argument. Instead, we move to his discussion of nineteenth-century mysticism, especially as espoused by Søren Kierkegaard in "his revolt against the systematic rationalism of Hegel, in his attack on official Christianity, and in the anti-intellectualism that permeated the Romantic movement."<sup>51</sup>

For Kierkegaard God is truth; but truth exists only for a believer who inwardly experiences the tension between himself and God. If an actually existing person is an unbeliever, then for him God does not exist. God exists only in subjectivity. . . .

But Christianity has always been regarded as an historical religion, not merely in the sense that it has had a history of nineteen hundred years, but specifically in the sense that it is based on historical events that happened that long ago.<sup>52</sup> . . . But for Kierkegaard . . . [p]assionate appropriation, the moment of decision, does away with the interval of history and makes one inwardly contemporaneous with Christ. The method is not intellectual; it is an experience of suffering and despair. The detached objective truth of Christianity is not to be had. Beginning with the preaching of the Apostles, all the centuries of history are worthless as a proof of it. The objective truth of Christianity is equivalent to its subjective indifference, its indifference to the subject, i.e., to me.

This type of thought provokes an obvious question. If there is no objective truth, if the How [we believe] supersedes the What [we believe], then can truth be distinguished from

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<sup>48</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 66-7.

<sup>49</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 68.

<sup>50</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 68.

<sup>51</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 73.

<sup>52</sup>As an aside we should note that this assertion should put to rest the common misrepresentations of Clark as an idealist or as one who denied the legitimacy of historical inquiry. He insisted on rigorous philosophical justification of historical claims and methods, but he did not reject history (or empirical evidence) itself.

fancy?<sup>53</sup>

Kierkegaard's epistemology cannot answer Yes. And if an epistemology cannot distinguish truth from fancy, then it fails as an epistemology.

Following in the footsteps of Kierkegaard, for whom truth was subjective encounter, not objective facticity, came Friedrich Nietzsche, for whom truth was *function* devoid of facticity. "What we now call truth therefore is that kind of error without which a species cannot live. The object of mental activity is not to know, in any scholastic sense, but to schematize and to impose as much regularity on chaos as practical needs require"—not to know but to survive. For Nietzsche, even the law of contradiction is not necessary but "only a sign of inability—our inability to affirm and deny one and the same thing," and there is no reason to assert a connection between our inability and transcendent truth (or falsehood). For Nietzsche, too, then, the quest for faith without reason leads to a faith that cannot differentiate truth from falsehood.

Clark goes on to critique William James, the pragmatist, and Emil Brunner, the neo-orthodox theologian, but we need not follow through the details there. Students who wish to may read Clark's book. Suffice it to say at this point simply that **Clark succeeds in demonstrating that faith without reason is as dead in the epistemological game as faith without works is dead in the soteriological game.**

In short, **Clark has demonstrated that reason cannot be the foundation of faith; that reason cannot be without faith; and that faith cannot be without reason. It follows that if the first three of the only four possible relations are false, the fourth must be true.** Clark proceeds to argue that "reason and faith are not antithetical but harmonious" and that "in opposition to secular but chiefly to religious irrationalism, faith [has] an intellectual content."<sup>54</sup> His discussion includes an extensive analysis of human personality and the roles in it of reason and faith, an analysis rooted in careful consideration of Biblical data, but again the details are unnecessary here. Let it suffice to say that "Exegesis will reveal that faith, Christian faith, is not to be distinguished from belief. Consider Hebrews 11:1. 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' This may not be a formal definition of faith, but it must be accepted as a true statement about faith. The [American Revised Version] says that 'faith is *assurance* of things hoped for, a *conviction* of things not seen.' Assurance and conviction are belief, strong belief, voluntary belief, and as intellectual as you please."<sup>55</sup> Thus the Christian faith has intellectual content, content supplied by Biblical revelation; it is not irrational, i.e., unreasonable. Rather,

**since the accusation of unreasonableness fails because the philosophies that make it collapse into skepticism, the Christian now need only identify reason with . . . logic.** It should not be identified with experience. When a Christian theologian is deducing consequences from Scriptural principles, he is reasoning—he is using his reason. To require him to test Scripture by sensation in order to avoid the charge of irrationalism is itself irrational prejudice.

With this conception of reason there no longer remains any conflict between reason and faith. The futility of rationalism [whether Descartes's or Locke's or Hume's or Kant's

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<sup>53</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 76-7.

<sup>54</sup>Clark, *Religioni, Reason, and Revelation*, 87.

<sup>55</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 100.

or Hegel's] and the insanity of irrationalism are equally to be avoided. Truth becomes obtainable. And this, we believe, should constitute a strong recommendation for Christian revelation.<sup>56</sup>

That is, taking Scripture and logic as axiomatic, the Christian can derive true knowledge. That is something that neither idealist nor empiricist rationalists nor irrationalists of any stripe can do.

Thus **revelation—and faith in it—is foundational to reason, not vice versa.**

### **B. How classical presuppositionalism responds to several challenges**

In the third through fifth chapters of *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* Clark uses his presuppositional method to respond to three challenges to the Christian faith.

First, he answers **challenges from the field of the philosophy of language**. Some have objected to the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture that it is inconsistent with the phenomena of Scripture. We do, after all, recognize differences in personality among the various writers. John's personality is not like Paul's, whose is not like Jeremiah's, whose is not like Moses', whose is not like David's. But if God was the author of all their writings, then there should be a uniform personality among them. Therefore God is not the author of their writings. Clark's reply is that the critics have not paid attention to enough of the phenomena of Scripture. Scripture reveals not only that its writers have different personalities but also that God sovereignly produced all their personalities. Therefore it should be no surprise that God, in breathing out His Word through them, employs the personalities He gave them. Others, like Geddes MacGregor (and John Wesley Robb), have argued that the inherent limitations of human language entail its inability to convey truth about the unlimited God; they insist therefore that all God-talk must be symbolic, none literal. Clark replies that the position is self-refuting, since the statement "the inherent limitations of human language entail its inability to convey truth about the unlimited God" purports to convey truth about God; if it succeeds, it is a counterexample to itself. Further, "if someone says that religious language cannot be literal, there appears to be no rational method of determining what the crucifixion is symbolic of. Is it pessimistically symbolic of an inherently unjust universe or is it symbolic of the love of God? On what grounds could one decide, if nothing in the account can be taken literally?"<sup>57</sup> Certain other objections to the adequacy of language to convey religious truth rest on materialist, evolutionary assumptions about the origin of language, which Clark demonstrates to be incapable of explaining how language can mean anything at all. No meaningful language is possible on a naturalistic basis.<sup>58</sup> One particular argument from linguistic philosophers has been that no statement is meaningful unless it is either verifiable or falsifiable empirically. Yet the claim is not only formally self-refuting (since it is not verifiable or falsifiable empirically) but also arose in violation of its own canon, for "Instead of being based on a study of words [that is, on an empirical program], the behavioristic theory of language is an implication from the general position of naturalism."<sup>59</sup> Still others have asserted that no language at all is literal; all is only symbolic. But, says Clark, "to call all language symbolic seems to empty of all significance the commonly recognized distinction between literal and figurative. Can one approve a theory of

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<sup>56</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 110.

<sup>57</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 123.

<sup>58</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 124-6.

<sup>59</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 128.

language that denies this distinction?”<sup>60</sup> Having demonstrated the inadequacy of the leading nontheistic, nonBiblical theories of language, Clark develops a theistic linguistics that recognizes the divine Logos and its image, the logos in man, as the ground for the adequacy of language to convey literal truth. In the philosophy of language, therefore, Biblical theism is a better axiom than its alternatives.

Second, he replies to **challenges from the field of ethics**. His aim is to argue that “moral convictions and moral education, based on law and right, can be consistently grounded on Biblical revelation”<sup>61</sup> and not on anything else—indeed, “that a rational life is impossible without being based upon a divine revelation.” His method, as previously, is to “analyze the implications of non-revelational ethics.”<sup>62</sup> He first refutes Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill’s utilitarianism, the aim of which is “the greatest good of the greatest number, i.e., the greatest total of pleasure.” This system is unjustifiable for a variety of reasons: its calculus is impossible for finite and time-bound minds; it cannot define the good it wants to measure without circularity; it fails to explain why Stalin’s massacres were evil; etc. Next he refutes John Dewey’s instrumentalism, in epistemology a system that holds that science aims to tell us not what is true but what works, and in ethics a subset of utilitarianism. Time does not permit reproducing Clark’s whole argument here; it is sufficient to point out that instrumentalism not only has all the weaknesses of its parent utilitarianism but also has others of its own, including its inability to justify one ethic over another any more than we can justify saying that one language is better than another, and its inability to sustain any distinction between *de facto* and *de jure*—what is and what ought to be. “Dewey repudiates the aims of private, one-sided advantage. . . . But what procedure of science [and scientific observation is all that Dewey’s ethic has available by which to know anything]—either biological science or economic science, not to mention physics and chemistry—demonstrates empirically that a purely private end is repulsive,” as Dewey calls it?<sup>63</sup> Rather, “Scientific method can produce no ideals whatever. Science is instrumental”—that is, it yields methods, but it does not purport even to yield truths, much less that any truths are ethical.<sup>64</sup> Having surveyed these chief representatives of non-revelational ethics and found them wanting, Clark again turns to Biblical revelation and finds that it can sustain a coherent system of ethics based on God’s revelation of right and wrong in His law. In sum, since every epistemology that rejects revelation as its foundation necessarily leads to skepticism—which Clark demonstrated earlier in the book—and if “skepticism means that man can have no knowledge, then an appeal to revelation, with its subordination of ethics to theology, is not skepticism. But everything else is.”<sup>65</sup> Again, the Biblical theistic worldview triumphs over its alternatives.

Third, Clark responds to **the problem of evil**. “How can the existence of God be reconciled with the existence of evil?”<sup>66</sup> Here again, as in earlier sections, Clark critiques nontheistic and nonBiblical attempts to solve the problem of evil (e.g., Zoroastrianism’s cosmic dualism with its

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<sup>60</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 129.

<sup>61</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 151.

<sup>62</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 152.

<sup>63</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 177.

<sup>64</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 183.

<sup>65</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 193.

<sup>66</sup>Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 195.

good and evil finite gods; Plato's unreconciled dualism; Aristotle's Unmoved Mover that exercises no control over history; the traditional "free will" defense adopted by various Christians, including—at his worst—Augustine; and others) and finds them all inadequate. Again he presents the Biblical alternative: an omniscient, omnipotent, all-good God who foreordains all things, the evil and the good, for His good purposes. Clark's discussion involves an important analysis and refutation of the concept of free will, but for the present purpose it is not necessary to recount the details. He also explains how God can be the ultimate cause of sin but, because He is not the immediate cause of it, not Himself a sinner. Thus Biblical determinism turns out to be the only coherent means of answering the problem of evil.

These brief summaries are not intended to reproduce the whole of Clark's arguments. They are intended only to illustrate **the method of classical presuppositionalism: demonstrate the inability of non-revelational systems of thought to solve the problem at hand, and then demonstrate the ability of a system of thought based on Biblical revelation to solve them.** If one is content to be incoherent and not to solve problems, then let him continue to embrace a non-Biblical system of thought. But if one wants to be coherent (consistent) and to solve problems, then he has no rational alternative aside from Biblical revelation.

Truly "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

### **III. Classical presuppositionalism, theistic proofs, and historical evidences**

What does classical presuppositionalism entail for theistic proofs and historical evidences? First, **its general attitude to theistic arguments is that they are permissible in principle but must be tested in two important ways: (a) Are they formally valid? (b) Is their conclusion Christian theism or something else?** Thus the ontological, cosmological, teleological, moral, and even some other theistic arguments are at least worth consideration. None should be rejected out of hand. As for me, I am at present persuaded that the best theistic proof is the ontological argument, which may be summarized thus: God is by definition the Being than which no greater can be conceived. It is conceivable that God exists not only in the imagination but also in reality. A being that exists in reality is greater than a being that exists only in the imagination. It follows from this that if God exists only in the imagination and not in reality, it is possible to conceive a being greater than the being than which no greater can be conceived, which is a contradiction. Therefore God must exist not only in the imagination but also in reality. **To put it bluntly, denying God's existence is implicitly self-contradictory and therefore must be false. Truly "the fool hath said in his heart, "There is no God."**

Second, **classical presuppositionalism's general attitude toward historical evidences is that they are useful as rejoinders to rebuttals, i.e., defeaters of defeaters, but, because of the limits of inductive logic, cannot establish general truths conclusively.** They yield at best probabilistic conclusions. Thus historical arguments for the resurrection of Christ are legitimate, but they should be carefully structured to avoid logical fallacies. Probably their most promising form is as an argument from the impossibility of the contrary: all attempts to explain the phenomena of the resurrection reports fail in comparison with the explanation that Christ did in fact rise from the dead. Again, historical arguments in defense of the Bible are legitimate, as I argued above, but Biblical inspiration cannot be deduced from them. No argument with particular premises (the only kind that can come from historical investigation) can establish a universal conclusion. While we can give historical evidence to confirm many Biblical claims, we cannot give historical evidence to

confirm thousands of others. To argue from the truth of particular claims to the truth of all claims in the Bible is to commit the inductive fallacy. Rather, the proper role of historical arguments for the Bible is as defeaters of defeaters. When critics allege that the Bible has erred here or there, the Christian historian rebuts the allegation, thus preserving the Bible from it.

### **Conclusion**

***Classical presuppositionalism is an apologetic method that (a) asserts Scripture (which includes the laws of logic) as axiomatic, (b) attacks competing worldviews and propositions at the presuppositional level where appropriate, and (c) defends logic and Scripture (and thus the whole of the Christian faith) against attacks by using noncircular arguments that include some theistic proofs and evidential arguments. It avoids the weaknesses of other apologetic methods and successfully refutes alternatives to Biblical faith. I commend it.***