

## Apologetic Method

### History and Current Discussion

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- I. The Nature of Apologetics: giving a reason of our hope (1 Pet. 3:15)
  - A. Divisions
    1. Proof: giving a rational basis for faith. 1 Cor. 15:1-11.
    2. Defense: answering the objections of unbelievers. Phil. 1:7, 16.
    3. Offense: exposing the foolishness of unbelieving thought. Psm. 14:1, 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16.
  - B. These divisions are perspectively related. To do one task completely, you must do the other two as well.
  - C. Apologetics a perspective on all preaching and teaching (Ezra Hyun Kim)
  - D. Subject-matter
    1. Proof
      - a. the existence of God
      - b. the truth of the gospel
    2. Defense
      - a. The problem of evil
      - b. Biblical criticism
      - c. Challenges of secular philosophy
      - d. Challenges of secular science
    3. Offense
      - a. falsehood of non-Christian religions
      - b. falsehood of non-Christian philosophy
      - c. falsehood of non-Christian science, etc.
- II. Original Opponents of Christianity
  - A. Jewish
    1. Objection: it is blasphemous to worship a man as God.
    2. Response: apologists sought to prove from Scripture that Jesus was the Messiah and, indeed, God in the flesh.
  - B. Romans
    1. Objection: Christians worshiped Jesus as King, so they were potential revolutionaries.
    2. Response: apologists tried to show that Christians were good citizens, that Jesus' kingdom was not of this world.
    3. Also responses to misunderstandings: cannibalism in the Lord's Supper, "atheism," etc.
  - C. Greek Philosophy
    1. A revolt against religious ways of explaining the world.
    2. So intellectual autonomy is sacred, "reason" the new ultimate.

3. Rationalism and irrationalism
- D. Heresies Within the Church
  1. Gnosticism
    - a. Claim secret knowledge.
    - b. World view similar to neoplatonism.
    - c. Taught disciplines for reabsorption.
  2. Docetism, Marcion, influenced by Gnosticism
- E. The challenge: speaking the truth in love; winsomeness without compromise.

III. The Second Century Apologists: "Preaching of Peter," Quadratus, Aristides, "The Letter to Diognetus," Justin Martyr, Tatian, Melito, Theophilus, Athenagoras.

- A. Some compromise with Gnostic-type world views.
  1. God without name.
  2. Emphasize negative descriptions of him.
  3. God as "being," sometimes *to on* (neuter).
  4. Emanationist/continuum thinking, confusing the Doctrine of the Trinity.
  5. Justin: God makes the world from pre-existing substance, as in Plato. Justin thinks Plato got the idea from Moses.
  6. Justin: human beings have *autexousion*, somewhat like libertarian free will.
  7. The Greeks lived *meta logou*, according to reason, so according to Jesus.
  8. Problem:
    - a. trying to make Christianity academically respectable.
    - b. Trying to make Christianity attractive by making it as much like the Greek views as possible.
- B. Apologetic method
  1. Try to persuade the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah, *Dialogue with Trypho*.
  2. Persuading Romans and others that Christians are good citizens.
  3. Informing his readers, vs. common misunderstandings.
  4. Christians agree with much in secular philosophy, but Christ is far superior to the philosophers.
  5. Justin on the Resurrection
    - a. It is possible, because God, who created all, has the power to raise from the dead.
    - b. The promise of salvation requires this.
    - c. The Resurrection is physical: the body emphasized in the Resurrection appearances of Christ.
    - d. If the Resurrection is only spiritual, it is less impressive.
  6. Summary
    - a. Investigates the logic of the Scripture accounts themselves, giving biblical evaluations.

- b. Gives the benefit of the doubt to pagan thought. Not much sense of antithesis.
  - c. (a) anticipates presuppositionalism, (b) neutrality.
  
- IV. Irenaeus (d. around 200)
  - A. Bishop of Lyon in France, with ties to the Johannine tradition (Polycarp, Papias) of Asia Minor.
  - B. Opposed the Gnostics, Marcion.
  - C. Theological Emphases
    - 1. Completed canon, sufficient Scripture: vs. Marcion.
    - 2. God: more emphasis on his concrete, living qualities.
    - 3. History of Redemption: God gets involved in the events of calendar time.
    - 4. Creation out of nothing.
    - 5. No subordination among the Trinitarian persons.
    - 6. Weaknesses
      - a. confusion of sin with finitude.
      - b. Salvation from the union of all flesh with God in Jesus' incarnation (compare eastern orthodoxy).
      - c. Deification (but how far do we press this language?)
      - d. Free will (*autexousion*).
  - D. Apologetic Against Gnosticism:
    - 1. If the semi-gods (*aeons*) are of one substance with the supreme being, how can they be ignorant of him?
    - 2. If they are divine, then how can they communicate with us who are nondivine?
    - 3. If they are nondivine, why should we assume that they can give us secret knowledge?
    - 4. Shows rationalist-irrationalist dialectic in Gnosticism.
  
- V. Tertullian (Carthage: 160-220)
  - A. *Prescription of Heretics*:
    - 1. Heretics have no right to enter the discussion!
    - 2. What has Athens to do with Jerusalem.
  - B. *On the Flesh of Christ*:
    - 1. Christianity does give offense to the unbelieving mind.
    - 2. That doesn't make it less likely, but more so.
    - 3. We should judge possibility theistically. The incarnation is possible because of God's power.
    - 4. "*Credo quia absurdum?*" He never said it. But he did believe that Christianity was more credible because it was *ineptum*, offensive to unbelief.
  - C. Summary
    - 1. More reflection on epistemology than in earlier thinkers, perhaps because of Tertullian's legal background. An advance.

2. More recognition of antithesis between Christian, non-Christian thinking, but with some inconsistency.
3. Some theological weaknesses, as with Justin and Irenaeus.

VI. Clement of Alexandria (155-220).

- A. Led the catechetical school in Alexandria.
- B. Teachings similar to Justin, little sense of antithesis.

VII. Augustine (354-430 A. D.)

- A. Background: Converted around 386 after involvement with Manichaeism and neo-Platonism. Became priest (391) and Bishop of Hippo (396). For theological autobiography, see *Confessions*.
  1. More aware than earlier Fathers of the philosophical differences between Christianity and other views.
  2. More personalistic than Justin, Origen, et al.
  3. Makes great contributions especially in the doctrines of the Trinity and Predestination, and in the philosophy of history (*The City of God*).
- B. *Soliloquies* (dialogues with Reason)
  1. "God and the soul, that is what I desire to know. Nothing more? Nothing whatever."
  2. But to know these, one must first learn Truth.
  3. Truth is by nature imperishable, for even if it perishes, it is still true that truth has perished; therefore truth has not perished.
  4. So truth is immutable and eternal, that is, divine.
  5. So God and the soul exist, and the Truth exists in both. (Even if I am being deceived, it is true that I am being deceived, so I exist.)
  6. Forms exist in the mind of God.
  7. Human knowledge, then, is by divine illumination.
  8. A kind of ontological argument. Truth and God are among the things of which their non-existence is inconceivable.
- C. *On the Teacher*
  1. Teaching (especially by signs) is impossible, unless the learner already knows what he is being taught. (Cf. Plato's *Meno* and the "paradox of ignorance.")
  2. So we can learn only because the mind already possesses Truth (compare Plato's theory of reminiscence).
  3. Skepticism about much of sense-experience, particular occurrences. Knowledge mainly of universals in those occurrences, which we know innately. Historical events in Scripture.
- D. *On the Immortality of the Soul*
  1. But what about error? How can the mind, which is true, turn to "stupidity?"

2. Answer: error, like evil, is a privation of being, a defectiveness in the reality of the mind.
3. This defect cannot destroy the soul altogether, for truth cannot perish.

E. *On the Profit of Believing*

1. Defense of authority: If we had never heard of any religion, we should seek out those famous for their knowledge. Of course, that does not prove their truth.
2. Influential in apologetics for the authority of the Roman Catholic magisterium.

F. Comments

1. One of the first elaborate Christian-theistic epistemologies, though very much under the influence of Plato.
2. Augustine says much about Truth in a rather abstract sense, as if it were a Platonic form. He does, finally, locate Truth in God's mind and identify it with God's own personal nature.
3. As with Plato, the relation between the divine Truth and the human mind that "participates" in Truth is somewhat obscure. Better: God reveals truths to man, by his sovereign control, authority, presence in the world.
4. Difficulties increase when Augustine considers error; for how can error exist in Truth? The "privation" theory is not satisfactory. If God created all and governs all things, the privations as well as the actualities are within his plan.
5. Augustine's skepticism about sense-experience, and about knowledge of particulars, is not biblical. Scripture puts much emphasis on historical narrative and upon testimony based on sense experience (1 John 1:1ff).
6. Nor are we like the ignorant person in *Profit of Believing*. For according to Rom. 1, nobody is religiously illiterate.
7. The combination of abstract Truth and skepticism about sense-experience suggests the rationalist-irrationalist dialectic of non-Christian philosophy.
8. But Augustine seeks to "believe that he may understand."

VIII. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)

- A. Background: Much influenced by Plato and Augustine. Sometimes called "the second Augustine."
- B.. *Credo ut Intelligam*: Anselm adopts Augustine's slogan, "I believe in order that I might understand."
  1. Suggests that faith precedes reasoning in divine matters. Anselm contrasts this with understanding in order to believe. Good; but perhaps it would be better to say that both faith and reason ought to be subject to God's Word.

2. Suggests also that reason is the goal of faith, that reason goes beyond faith or builds upon it in some way. This can be taken in good or bad senses.
- C. *Cur Deus Homo?* ("Why the God-man?")
1. Extremely influential treatise on why Jesus became incarnate and died: as satisfaction for sin.
  2. Somewhat rationalistic in plan: "...leaving Christ out of view (as if nothing had ever been known of him), it (the book) proves, by absolute reasons, the impossibility that any man should be saved without him." The book does, however, smuggle in many biblical assumptions.
- D. *Monologium*: rational arguments on the existence, unity and nature of God, similar to those of Aquinas (below). Note again the plan: "that nothing in Scripture should be urged upon the authority of Scripture itself, but that whatever the conclusion of independent investigation should declare to be true, should...be briefly enforced by the cogency of reason..."
- E. *Proslogium*: "The Ontological Argument for God's Existence"
1. Roots in Parmenides, Plato, Augustine. Rejected by Aquinas and Kant; accepted in various revised forms by the continental rationalists, the idealists, some recent apologists, some language analysis philosophers (N. Malcolm, A. Plantinga), process philosophers and theologians.
  2. Seems like a game with words, but very difficult to refute. Has captivated philosophers of every generation since.
  3. Formulations
    - a. God is "that than which no greater can be conceived."
    - b. A God who exists outside the mind is greater than one who exists only in the mind.
    - c. Thus, if God existed only in the mind, a greater than he could be conceived, namely one existing outside the mind. That cannot be.
    - d. Therefore, God exists outside the mind.
    - e. Simplified form: God is perfect; perfection entails existence; therefore God exists.
  4. This argument can be interpreted in terms of the Platonism of the early Augustine (q.v.): That being which corresponds to imperishable truth must exist. The *idea* of God must have a real being.
    - a. It is true that the ontological argument can be used, and has been used, to prove almost any kind of ultimate. Compare the different "gods"

- proved by Spinoza, Descartes, Hegel, Malcolm, Hartshorne.
- b. One reason for this is that the argument depends on the concept of "perfection," a value-judgment which differs greatly from thinker to thinker.
  - c. Such an analysis ties in well with the Platonic-rationalistic emphasis in Anselm's other writings.
5. But there are some indications that Anselm's formulation of this argument (as opposed to the formulations of Descartes, Spinoza, etc.) tends toward a distinctively Christian presuppositionalism.
- a. The document is written as a prayer, as reasoning in the presence of God. It is clear, then, that the author has no real doubts as to God's existence.
  - b. He asks God to clarify his understanding, recognizing the weakness and sinfulness of his own nature.
  - c. "...I long to understand in some degree thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, - that unless I believed, I should not understand."
  - d. The title "that than which no greater can be conceived" is taken as a *datum* given by revelation - a presupposition.
  - e. When Gaunilo replies "on behalf of the fool" (who says there is no God), Anselm refuses to reply to the fool; he replies only to the "Catholic;" and in replying, he appeals to Gaunilo's "faith and conscience".
  - f. From these considerations, it is clear that Anselm has a particular "God" in mind, and a concept of "perfection" derived from the Scriptures. One could, then, accept this "proof" as a genuine presuppositional argument, setting forth the role of divine existence within the system of Christian faith.
  - g. Even as such it could hardly be persuasive without more epistemological prolegomena.
6. All in all, the nature of the argument is difficult to ascertain. There are elements here both of Platonic rationalism and of genuine Christian insight.
7. Reconstruction

- (1) The proof may be seen as an appeal to one's "presupposition," his "basic commitment," his paradigm of perfection.
- (2) For Christians: the God of Scripture, our paradigm of perfection, must exist; else, all evaluations, predications are meaningless.

#### IX. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

- A. Significance: Aquinas is the most important of the medieval thinkers, and until Vatican II his philosophy dominated the thought of the Roman Catholic Church. In response to the challenge of newly discovered writings of Aristotle which were being used against Christianity, Aquinas produced a massive, ingenious synthesis (cf. Origen) between Christianity and Aristotle. Aquinas is also deeply influenced by neo-Platonism, particularly by way of Pseudo-Dionysius.
- B. Faith and Reason
  1. "Natural reason," operating apart from revelation, is able to discover many things, not only about the natural world, but even about God (his existence and major attributes).
  2. Other things are known only by revelation and are received only by faith (the trinity, creation *ex nihilo*, etc.)
  3. Some things provable by natural reason are also revealed, so that those unable to prove them may nevertheless know them.
  4. Comment: This distinction makes reason autonomous within its own sphere, although faith has a "veto power" when reason contradicts something revealed. Thus, Thomas develops his basic metaphysical scheme out of Aristotle and fits the data of Scripture into that scheme as best he can.
- C. Epistemology
  1. Thomas holds, with Aristotle and against Plato, that in general forms are found in things, together with matter, not in some separate world.
  2. Knowledge, then, is a matter of abstracting the forms from the things in which those forms are found.
  3. All knowledge, then, begins in sense experience; but it is not genuine knowledge until the "active intellect" determines the essential or universal properties (forms) of the things it investigates.
  4. Foundationalist account of *scientia*. Foundational premises from direct acquaintance, by which we see that a particular predicate belongs to a particular subject.

5. Since we have no sense experience of God (or angels), we can know of them only by revelation or through their effects.
  - a. "Way of causality" - attributing to God the ability to cause all things known in experience.
  - b. "Way of remotion" (*via negativa*) - since God far surpasses our intellect, we cannot say what God is (his essence); but we can learn what he is not, by distinguishing him from all that is merely finite, creature.
  - c. "Way of eminence" - ascribing to God in utmost degree every perfection known in our experience.
  - d. Comment: At no point in these discussions of method does Thomas demand that the process be subject to God's revelation of himself. There is thus nothing to prevent these reasonings from being caught up in the rationalist/irrationalist dialectic. God will become a larger version of creaturely properties, or an indefinite opposite (remotion) to those properties.

D. Proofs of God's Existence

1. Cosmological (God as adequate cause)
  - a. From motion
    - (i) Every moving thing must be moved by something else.
    - (ii) No infinite regress of movers, for without a first mover there would be no second or third mover.
    - (iii) Thus there is a first mover, itself unmoved and unmoving.
  - b. From efficient cause (steps same as above: Every effect must be caused by something else, etc.)
    - (i) For Aquinas, this series is not temporal. The first motion is the first in a causal series, not the first in time.
    - (ii) William Lane Craig prefers the *Kalam* cosmological argument, from Muslim sources:
      - (A) Whatever begins to exist has a cause. *Ex nihil, nihil fit.*
      - (B) The universe began to exist.
        - (1) Impossibility of an actual infinite.
        - (2) Impossibility of forming an actual infinite by successive addition.
        - (3) The Big Bang.

(C) The Resurrection of Jesus proves the *Christian* God.

- c. From the contingency of the world
  - (i) If the whole world is contingent (i.e., if it is possible for everything in the world not to be), then at one time the world did not exist.
  - (ii) If at one time it did not exist, then it would not exist now, for there would at that time have been nothing to cause its existence.
  - (iii) Therefore everything in the world is not contingent. There must be something which exists necessarily, God.
2. Criteriaological (Sometimes this one is called cosmological, sometimes teleological, sometimes a Platonic reversion to something like the ontological which Thomas had rejected earlier. It doesn't much matter what you call it.)
  - a. Things are more or less good, true, noble etc. as they approximate a standard which is the maximum in these qualities.
  - b. This maximum is the cause of all lesser manifestations of the quality.
  - c. Thus (by causal argument) the maximum must actually exist.
3. Teleological (Actually a certain kind of cosmological argument which asks a sufficient cause for the phenomenon of purposefulness.)
  - a. Unintelligent beings including natural objects act for an end, a purpose.
  - b. This cannot be unless they are directed by an intelligent being, i.e., God.
  - c. Used extensively by William Paley, F. R. Tennant, Hugh Ross, many contemporary apologists.
4. Comments
  - a. The proofs presuppose univocal knowledge of God, particularly in the predicates "mover," "cause," "necessity," and "intelligence." The criteriaological argument suggests that God has creaturely properties in maximum degree. This univocism conflicts with Thomas' emphasis on analogy.
  - b. For Aristotle, God is "cause" of the world, not as its creator *ex nihilo*, but merely as its underlying

principle. The world is eternal, for Aristotle. Thomas does not adequately distinguish his concept of cause from that of Aristotle, and thus proves only a god correlative with the world. (Later, he affirms creation *ex nihilo* on the basis of revelation.)

- c. Hume and Kant: on an empirical basis, one cannot generalize from observed causal and teleological relations within the world to a cause or purpose for the world. None of us has any experience of the world as a totality sufficient to justify such inference.
- d. Kant: The cosmological and teleological proofs reduce to the ontological, because both proceed from a mere idea of which no experience is possible ("cause of all") to the reality corresponding to the idea.
- e. The proofs nevertheless have some usefulness:
  - (i) Taken as they are, they are useful *ad hominem* devices. If people act on certain assumptions (cause, criterion, purpose) in everyday life, why should they not make the same assumptions at the ultimate level? The only unbelieving response to this consideration is reversion to an irrationalism (as in Hume and Kant), and that is also vulnerable. "Opposing non-Christian irrationalism by non-Christian rationalism."
  - (ii) Revised, they set forth a Christian basis for belief in God.
    - (A) Insist vs. Aristotle that a cause is required not only for the motion of the world, but even for its very existence, even for its matter.
    - (B) Insist vs. Aristotle, Hume and Kant that an empiricist epistemology is inadequate; that all argument must presuppose God's self-revelation.
    - (C) Within a Christian framework, then, we can point out that the concepts of cause, motion, contingency, criterion and purpose presuppose God for their intelligibility. Unless God exists, it makes no sense to

speak of anything as cause of anything else, etc. Without God all is an empty blank (rationalism) or unrelated chance happenings (irrationalism).

(D) So understood, the proofs are remarkably biblical! For they set forth areas in which Scripture stresses the clear revelation of God's presence:

- 1) Cosmological: creation (situational perspective)
- 2) Criteriological: God as standard, criterion, law (normative perspective)
- 3) Teleological: God as constantly involved with creation, directing it in providence (situational, existential).

#### X. John Calvin (1505-1564)

##### A. The Knowledge of God

1. For Calvin, this involves reverence and love for God (*Institutes*, I, ii, I), not merely intellectual assent.
2. Thus it is of little concern to Calvin whether or how unbelievers may be brought to a point of assent, unless at the same time they are brought out of sin into the love of God.
3. Knowledge of God and knowledge of self are interrelated (I, i, 1). As to which "comes first," Calvin is uncertain.
4. Comment: Though somewhat anticipated in Augustine and in Anselm's *Proslogium*, this approach marks a real advance. It brings the existential and normative perspectives into apologetics with full force. Now apologetics must deal with the inward man, not just the outward evidences; he must appeal to the whole person, not just the intellect; and he must bring God's authoritative saving message, not a bare notion of divine existence.

- ##### B. The Comprehensiveness of Revelation: Calvin's view of divine sovereignty enables him for the first time clearly to declare all things wholly revelational of God. Since God's plan alone determines nature, history and individual life, God is clearly revealed in all of these areas. Thus Calvin opens the full range of created reality to apologetics. All facts are evidence

for God, not merely the facts of causality, teleology, etc. Cf. "comprehensiveness of covenant" as definition of Calvinism.

- C. Total Depravity
1. Since revelation is comprehensive, the unbeliever is fully responsible - not only for his failure to assent to revealed propositions, but particularly for his failure to worship God.
  2. The unbeliever, however, rejects entirely the witness of creation, and he has no power in himself to receive the truth.
  3. If, then, he is to be persuaded (=converted), God must work through his special revelation (Scripture) and the testimony of the Holy Spirit.
  4. Unbelieving religions and philosophies, though they display intelligence and insight of various sorts derived from the "sense of deity," show no knowledge of God in the sense defined above. In that respect, their systems are "stupidity and silliness."
- D. Evidences Confirm the Truth: To the regenerate, the excellencies of Scripture and extra-Scriptural evidences (I, viii, 1) serve as secondary aids to confirm faith.

## XI. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

- A. Background
1. Devoted to mathematics and physics in his youth. Major discoveries.
  2. After a conversion, devoted to service of religion, 1655.
  3. Deeply influenced by the Jansenism of the convent at Port Royal, where his sister was a nun. Jansenism was an Augustinian movement within the Roman Catholic Church, condemned as heretical in 1653. Strongly predestinarian, ascetic, critical of the church's hierarchy and sacramental views.
  4. His thought also shows influence of Calvinism, either by way of Jansenism or directly.
- B. Significance:
1. The most important apologist of the seventeenth century, and possibly the most biblical. During this period other apologists, including the mainstream reformed theologians, had reverted to a sort of Thomist-Aristotelian apologetic, the main alternative being a Cartesian rationalism. In Pascal all of this is rejected.
  2. Pascal introduces significant new emphases into apologetics.
    - a. He is perhaps the first Christian apologist to confront seriously the implications of modern science.

- b. Emphasis on probability, rather than demonstration.
  - c. Emphasis on the heart, the subjective or existential dimension.
  - d. More sophisticated use of logic and mathematics.
  - 3. At the same time, there are in Pascal elements which were to play into the hands of later subjectivists and existentialists.
  - 4. Pascal is one of the most powerful writers among apologists - cf. Augustine, C. S. Lewis.
- C. Critique of Complacency
- 1. Pascal begins by damning the casual attitude toward religious questions which he finds characteristic of his age. These are matters of life and death and deserve the most passionate attention.
  - 2. The new astronomy shows to man his incredible smallness, yet throws into told relief his greatness, his transcendence underscores the solemnity of the question of man's purpose and destiny.
- D. Religious Epistemology
- 1. Reason (i.e., the method of mathematics and science) depends on the heart for a broad grasp of that reality from which reason abstracts. (Cf. Kuyper, Dooyeweerd).
    - a. Pascal's "heart" is not emotion but intuitive understanding.
    - b. The heart is also that which loves.
    - c. God is known by the heart, not by reason.
      - (1) God is hidden from man because of his sin.
      - (2) God is not an "axiom" or the bare "first cause" of the theistic proofs.
      - (3) Most of our decisions, though informed by reason, are not determined by it. Rational calculation alone will not give us the courage to cross a dangerous bridge. The same for religious decisions.
      - (4) You don't come to love someone by enumerating the rational causes of love, etc.
      - (5) Love of God, in particular, precedes knowledge.
      - (6) Comment: Good insight here on love, etc., and it is certainly true that heart-commitment is prior to reasoning in our relation to God. However, there are here some elements of non-Christian irrationalism, for Pascal almost seems to deny that the evidence for God is compelling.

2. Faith

- a. A function of the heart, not of reason
- b. A gift of God, not worked up by reasoning.
- c. Thus in religion all questions resolved by reference to authority.
- d. But in science faith is out of place (vs. clerical intrusions upon scientific freedom) (Irrationalism).

3. Religious Decision

- a. The Wager
  - (1) If Christianity is true and you bet against it, you lose all.
  - (2) If Christianity is untrue and you bet in favor of it, you lose nothing.
  - (3) Thus prudence dictates a wager in favor of Christianity. (cf. William James, "The Will to Believe")
  - (4) Comment:
    - (a) One common criticism is that Pascal overlooks the other possibilities - e.g. that Islam is true and people will be punished for betting on Christianity. But on Christian presuppositions (which Pascal accepts) there are only two possibilities - Christianity or nihilism; i.e. only one possibility. Pascal's weakness is not emphasizing this fact sufficiently.
      - (i) He does, however, believe he has evidence that gives theism a high probability, vs. other possibilities.
      - (ii) The character of the Christian God and the corresponding benefit to be obtained is distinctive, and must be weighed in the equation.
    - (b) Is this a merely prudential argument? An appeal to one's own best interest, or worse, to fear? Well, Scripture itself sometimes makes such appeals.
    - (c) Do the terms of the wager presuppose that Christianity is only a possibility, something which may or may not be true? Well, we may not derive such a notion merely from the use of "if" for that word may indicate an entirely unreal condition. On the other hand, one suspects that such notions may exist in

the background of the argument, and of course that must be criticized.

- (d) Even if the argument presupposes that Christianity is a mere possibility, it may be a useful device, bringing considerations from non-Christian irrationalism to counter a smug rationalism.
- (e) What is involved in "wagering"? If it involves a decision to reorient one's whole life and thought (including one's conception of "possibility"), if it involves genuine repentance as opposed to mere outward assent, then the idea is unobjectionable.
- (f) The argument shows a real psychological insight into some religious motivations.

b. Acting as if

- (1) If you go to mass, take the holy water, etc., you will eventually be able to believe. Act as if you believe, and eventually you will.
- (2) Comment: Is Pascal here recommending hypocritical participation in worship as a preparation for true faith? This is unlikely in view of his general emphasis on heart commitment. More likely he is talking about people who have intellectual doubts. For them, often, the best advice is not to ponder metaphysical arguments, but to get involved with preaching and worship, to attend to areas of the religious life other than the strictly intellectual. This life-style can create the passional prerequisites for actual Christian belief. Existential perspective. Whether this is preparation for regeneration in the technical Reformed sense, Pascal does not seem to be concerned.

6. Arguments for Christianity (mostly traditional, and in Pascal's mind only probable, but yielding practical certainty. Our evaluation of these depends on to some extent on our heart-condition).

a. Comparative religion:

- (1) Non-Christian religions encourage man's pride or despair; only Christianity rebukes both. (Insightful!)

- (2) Christianity does what we would expect the true religion to do - speaks worthily of God, provides for our needs, etc. (Comment: assumes that the unbeliever can interpret his needs apart from the Gospel, determine what is worthy of God, etc. In fact, Pascal is here using Christian criteria of what is "worthy," and he ought to make that plain. To do so would not diminish the force of the argument, for the unbeliever knows that this is true.)
  - b. The success of the Christian church against impossible odds.
  - c. The character of Christ and the biblical writers - their trustworthiness. (Pascal focuses movingly on Christ here.)
  - d. The character of Christian believers.
  - e. The preservation of the Jews.
  - f. The argument from prophecy.
  - g. The argument from miracle.
  - h. The ring of truth in the biblical accounts, especially their picture of Jesus.
  - i. Resurrection: why would the apostles have lied and put their lives on the line?
  - j. Comment:
    - (1) These arguments do bring forth facts which the unbeliever needs to hear.
    - (2) As appeals to that knowledge which the unbeliever has, yet hinders, these arguments can be effective. Yet Pascal does not stress this context, and thus the unbeliever may be led to feel that his own principles are adequate to judge this evidence.

## XII. Joseph Butler (1692-1752)

### A. Background

1. Born to Presbyterian family, but becomes Anglican bishop, with Arminian theology.
2. Philosophically indebted to Locke's empiricism.
3. Sober, judicious, opposed to Wesleyan "enthusiasm."
4. The character of Cleanthes in Hume's *Dialogues* may be patterned after Butler.
5. His opponents, in his major work *The Analogy of Religion*, were deists who, though accepting the existence of an "author of nature," denied the distinctive teachings of Christianity.
6. He has had much influence in the history of (especially evangelical) apologetics. Van Til refers to the "traditional method" as the

“Aquinas-Butler method.” Actually, William Paley may be a more influential figure.

#### B. Epistemology

1. Following Locke, Butler denies innate ideas and insists that all reasoning be based on sense-experience. He opposes the more rationalistic apologetics of Descartes and Samuel Clarke.
2. Rationalism: Nevertheless, he holds that when reason is rightly used (the “reasonable use of reason”) it must have the final say: “Let reason be kept to: and if any part of the Scripture account of the redemption of the world by Christ can be shown to be really contrary to it, let the Scripture, in the name of God, be given up.”
3. “Probability is the very guide to life.”
  - a. In empirical matters there is no absolute demonstration. All empirical assertions have only probability in varying degrees.
  - b. Lacking any hope of absolute certainty, we not only *may*, but *must*, base our beliefs and decisions on probabilities. Prudence is a moral obligation.
  - c. Where there is a cumulation of many lines of probable argumentation, the evidence is “not only increased, but multiplied,” so that it produces certainty for all *practical* purposes. Cf. the “cumulative case” argument of Paul Feinberg, in *Five Views*.
  - d. If we must be governed by probable judgments in other areas of life, then we must be so governed in religion.
  - e. Note that Butler resolves the problem of doubt practically, rather than theoretically, as Hume, Reid, Kant, Nietzsche, Pierce, Wittgenstein, and many others since his time.
4. Analogy
  - a. We come to determine probabilities by forming analogies between the known and the unknown, and between past experience and the present and future.
  - b. We also use analogy to reason from the laws of one realm to those of another. This procedure assumes that the “author of nature” governs all realms by essentially the same laws. Newtonian science had made this assumption plausible to Butler; it was not so plausible to Hume and Kant.
  - c. So it is legitimate to assume that principles governing the natural world will in like manner govern man’s relation to God. (Van Til called this the “principle of continuity.”)
  - d. But since we do not see the whole universe from God’s point of view, and since God is beyond our complete understanding, we must expect also certain *differences* between the two realms (“principle of discontinuity”).

- e. Butler wants to show the deists that there is an analogy between natural revelation (which they claim to accept) and special revelation (which they do not).
  - (i) Reasons for accepting special revelation are similar to, and just as strong as, the reasons for accepting natural revelation.
  - (ii) The problems and mysteries of special revelation are no greater than those of natural revelation.

#### B. Argument for Immortality

1. We persist through many radical changes in our physical life, from embryo to old age. Thus it is not unlikely that we will persist through the radical but analogous change of death.
2. Natural things and human powers have “momentum”—i.e. when pursuing a certain course, things tend to persist in that course.
3. We know that the powers of the self can persist through apparent inactivity (sleep, coma).
4. Bodily changes do not necessarily affect our ability to think; so it may well be that when the body dies, the mind continues to exist and act.
5. But is there not also an analogy between the death of the body and the death of the soul? Shouldn't we assume that the latter accompanies the former? Here Butler invokes the “principle of discontinuity.” We do not know enough about the source of the soul's powers to say that it expires with the body.

#### C. Comments

1. Van Til condemned apologetic arguments from probability on the ground that they denied the clarity of God's general and special revelation. I disagree with my mentor: Scripture tells us that the *evidence* for Christian theism is clear; but it doesn't tell us that every *argument* based on that evidence must have a certain conclusion. Any degree of modesty about our arguments may legitimately lead us to claim only probability.
2. And, as Butler said, probability is a normative guide to life.
3. Butler is right to emphasize that there are analogies (and disanalogies!) between nature and Scripture, for one God is author of both.
  - a. In Van Tillian terms, we can say that Butler is telling the non-Christian either to be consistent in his unbelief (by rejecting *both* nature and Scripture and embracing chaos) or to become a Christian.
  - b. But Butler's analogies are sometimes unpersuasive as he states them.
    - (i) The mother hen, who sacrifices herself for her chicks, as an analogy for the self-sacrifice of Jesus. Does this sort of analogy destroy the uniqueness of the atonement?

- (ii) Couldn't we reverse the continuity and discontinuity of the argument for immortality?
  - (A) The analogy would be between the death of the body and the death of the soul.
  - (B) The disanalogy would be between the changes of life and the major change from life to death. Who is to say that these are identical?
- 4. Although Christianity does meet all legitimate demands of reason, as Van Til said, Butler's "Let reason be kept to" is a highly misleading principle. It seems to put reason ahead of Scripture.
- 5. Butler does not set forth the gospel clearly, particular in its relevance to human thought. He does not challenge men to intellectual repentance.

### XIII. William Paley (1743-1805): "Evidentialism"

#### A. Teleological Argument

1. If you find a stone in the field, you suppose that it may have been there for centuries.
2. But if you find a watch, you never suppose that. There are evidences of intelligent design.
3. Evidences of design in nature are even more pervasive, convincing: many instances of means adapted to ends.
  - a. Hume: given infinite time, anything can happen by chance.
  - b. Paley: But universal experience testifies that these are works of intelligence.
4. A uniform purpose evident in all these evidences, so there is one designer. (Contra Hume)

#### B. Cosmological Argument: Though you increase the number of links to infinity, a chain can never support itself.

#### C. Miracles

1. Vs. Hume, the witnesses can be trusted, since they maintained their witness even unto death.
2. Hume: universal experience testifies against miracle. Paley: that begs the question.

#### D. Evaluation

1. A major influence on modern evangelical apologetics.
2. Not much attention to epistemology.

### XIV. Thomas Reid (1710-1796)

#### A. Background

1. Scottish Presbyterian minister, dominated the "Scottish Common Sense School" of philosophy (Turnbull, Hutcheson, Dugald Stewart, William Hamilton).

2. That philosophy came to dominate the teaching of Princeton University and Theological Seminary through the 1800s.
  3. Reid's thought was eclipsed through much of the twentieth century, but was rediscovered by some recent analytic philosophers such as Keith Lehrer, Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff.
  4. Today, his influence is great among professional philosophers, especially in the English-speaking world.
- B. Faculties of the Mind
1. Innate powers of the mind, giving rise to concepts of qualities and of sensed objects.
  2. Not reducible to sensations, as in Hume. Concepts, as opposed to sensations, have *objects*. They are always concepts of something. (Cf. later phenomenology.)
  3. This process creates immediate, irresistable convictions, which are justified beliefs.
- C. Why Should We Trust Our Faculties?
1. Else, we are lost in skepticism.
  2. Our faculties provide us with first principles.
    - a. These are "common sense," accepted by people in everyday conversation and business.
    - b. They cannot be justified by Cartesian arguments or by reduction to sensation, as in Hume.
    - c. But they don't need that sort of justification. You may accept them without being able to justify them, without even being able to show why they belong to common sense.
    - d. They do display some "marks" by which they can be recognized:
      - (i) early appearance of its operation
      - (ii) universality in mankind
      - (iii) irresistability (they "force assent").
  3. Examples of first principles (non-exhaustive)
    - a. The reliability of consciousness in showing us what exists.
    - b. Conscious thoughts reveal a *self*, *mind*, or *person*.
    - c. Reliability of memory.
    - d. Personal identity continues through the course of remembered events.
    - e. General reliability of sense perception.
    - f. We have free will.
    - g. General reliability of all natural faculties ("reason").
    - h. Others also have life, intelligence.
      - (i) "The problem of other minds."

- (ii) Some evidence is possible: “their words and actions indicate like powers of understanding as we are conscious of in ourselves.
- (iii) Belief in God a subclass of these beliefs. (Cf. Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*.)
- i. Physical features and actions of people reveal their minds.
- j. Regard due to human testimony and authority.
- k. People’s actions are more or less regular.
- l. The future will be like the past.

#### D. Comments

##### 1. Reid and Empiricism

- a. Hume, too, recognized that for practical purposes we must set our skeptical doubts aside and follow “custom.” One could read Reid as giving a systematic analysis of custom. But as such, he exposes Hume’s effort as a trivial exercise, having nothing to do with what “knowledge” is, in the real world, at best a philosophical refutation of consistent sensationalism.
- b. Empiricism had made the common mistake of trying to explain the obvious by the obscure, and then explaining away the obvious by reference to the obscure. What, actually, are we most directly acquainted with? Humean “impressions?” Or are those abstractions from our everyday knowledge of objects?

##### 2. Reid and Christian Theism

- a. Reid is true to his Presbyterian theology in regarding the faculties of the mind as divinely implanted and therefore as trustworthy.
- b. How is God known? See principle h, above. We conclude his existence from an argument based on his actions and effects. (Plantinga, however, influenced by Reid, makes the existence of God a foundational principle.)
- c. Reid does not recognize any dependence of our faculties, evidence, arguments, upon divine revelation. (autonomy, rationalism)
- d. There is also, however, a certain arbitrariness in Reid’s approach. He seems to be saying that if there is something we all want to believe, but we can’t prove it, we should make it a first principle. (“When in doubt, presuppose.”) Irrationalism?
- e. Reidians, however (like John Gerstner and R. C. Sproul), sometimes suggest a transcendental argument for God’s existence.
  - (i) We must trust our senses, reason, etc.
  - (ii) But these have no meaning unless God exists.

- (iii) So we must believe in God as the ground of these faculties.
- (iv) This argument seems to me to be functionally equivalent to Van Til's transcendental argument.

## XV. Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

### A. Importance

1. His writings were perhaps the most important factor in motivating Barth and Bultmann to move beyond Ritschlianism. Barth later sought to distance himself from Kierkegaard - especially from his time/eternity dialectic; but the basic structure of his thought (in my opinion remained very close to Kierkegaard.
2. Kierkegaard has also had much influence upon secular philosophers - one of the few modern Christians to have such influence.
  - a) Existentialism - especially Heidegger. Some would dispute the existentialists' use of Kierkegaard.
  - b) Wittgenstein, the language analyst, read Kierkegaard before it became fashionable to do so. This may account for a number of Wittgenstein's views, particularly his analysis of religious language.
3. For all of his influence upon liberal theology and secular philosophy, it is not at all clear that his thought should be classified with either of those two traditions. He is at least arguably evangelical; at least, one can find edification in his writings in a way that one cannot find in such as Barth and Bultmann.

### B. Background

1. Personal problems
  - a) Anxiety-ridden childhood
  - b) Broken engagement
  - c) Persecution by the press
2. His concern: how to become a Christian within "Christendom" - i.e. the formalism of the state church.
3. Reaction against Hegel's attempt to reduce Christianity to a philosophical system.
4. Very well educated, but did not (except occasionally, usually with satiric intent) write in an "academic" style.
5. Wrote using pseudonyms.
  - a) Admiring Socrates, he wanted to convey truth, not simply by describing his views, but by presenting various alternatives to the reader, producing an internal "dialogue."
  - b) Thus, he would not be suspected of reducing the truth to a "system."
  - c) This is a form of "indirect communication" (below).

### C. Vs. System (anti-abstractionism)

1. Abstract concepts cannot adequately describe individual existence, motion.
  2. Arguments, propositional knowledge never, in themselves, force one to choose, to act.
    - a) Arguments are in hypothetical form ("if p then q"). They yield a conclusion only if the premise is accepted; but that requires a free decision.
    - b) Once a conclusion is granted, another free decision is necessary if one is to act upon that conclusion.
  3. Such decision and action is what is most crucial to human nature. Therefore abstract concepts and arguments are quite limited in value.
  4. What is needed is concrete description of the nature of decision; but that is difficult to convey in words which by their nature are somewhat abstract. "Indirect communication" seeks, without abstract description, to give one sense of how this takes place.
  5. There are additional reasons why Christian faith, as a human decision, cannot be conveyed through the communication of abstract concepts. See below.
- D. Stages on Life's Way (You can't get from one stage to another by thinking; you must make a "leap.")
1. The Aesthetic Stage
    - a) Uncommitted, irresponsible, dedicated to pure enjoyment; selfish.
    - b) Won't take a stand for fear of boredom.
    - c) May be diabolical, manipulative.
    - d) Growing weariness, self-disgust, despair.
    - e) Key: Unwilling to choose a way of life; simply living from moment to moment. No "either/ or."
  2. The Ethical Stage
    - a) Kantian obedience to absolute moral law.
    - b) Mutual obligation, not living as a mere spectator.
    - c) Universal standard: do what is right for all men -- vs. individual inclination.
    - d) Incorporates the aesthetic stage, deepens it: Only the ethical is truly beautiful.
    - e) Find your duties based on your station in society (idealism).
    - f) Frustration, however: we do not in ourselves have the power to keep the moral law.
  3. "Religion A"
    - a) All forms of religion, including paganism, formalized Christianity, which fall short of true faith (religion B).
    - b) Trying to relate to God, absolve guilt, based on your own resources.
    - c) Recognition of divine -- essentially passive relation to him.
    - d) Characteristics

- (1) Resignation (renounce relative goals)
  - (2) Suffering (sorrow over resignation, need of transformation)
  - (3) Guilt
    - (a) Recognizes partially severed fellowship.
    - (b) With unknown god
  - e) Passive participation in ceremonies, ordinances, religious duties (as in the Danish state church).
4. "Religion B"
- a) True Christianity, governed by faith alone.
  - b) At God's initiative (incarnation, establishing a relationship with men).
  - c) Object: the absurd, the absolute paradox, the eternal entering time.
    - (1) Not a real contradiction, but an apparent one.
    - (2) Eternal truth related to an existing individual (cf. C, above)
    - (3) Not resolvable in a higher "synthesis" as in Hegel
    - (4) Beyond Religion A: not just going beyond the evidence, as in religion A, but belief in something which itself is paradoxical.
    - (5) Also transcends moral law (Abraham and Isaac).  
"Teleological suspension" of the ethical norms.
  - d) Thinks of God as a person, not a mere idea, as religion A.
  - e) Not a doctrine, but an "existence-communication" by which we are actually transformed. No "direct communication."
  - f) Sense of sin
    - (1) Can't be explained, but only experienced (How can an innocent person fall into sin?)
    - (2) Genesis 3 -- not historical, but describes everyman.
    - (3) Unlike the "guilt" of religion A, this is an offense against a personal God.
    - (4) Thus the break in fellowship is seen to be far more radical.
  - g) Living in the spirit/life of the flesh. vs. formal religion.
  - h) Can give reasons, but cannot await all the facts (like marriage).
    - (1) Don't choose because of promises of blessing; Jesus offers only sufferings.
    - (2) Vs. Platonic recollection: here the moment is decisive; the moment in which we are actually transformed.
    - (3) Unlike other knowledge, the person of the teacher is important to the learning of it. His willingness to die for truth.
    - (4) Grace is decisive.
  - i) Religion B combines the immediacy of the aesthetic sphere with the decisive choice of the ethical, Almost like a Hegelian dialectic, though Kierkegaard, would resist the comparison.
  - j) Thus Religion B is not conveyed through assent to propositional truth, It is possible to believe all true religious propositions without true faith, without the passionate inwardness which constitutes "subjectivity."

E. God

1. Emphasis on transcendence, wholly-otherness, yet “contemporary”
2. The true God is *incognito* - i.e., he cannot be reached through the rational processes of science and philosophy. He can be grasped only in passionate inwardness.

F. History

1. Kierkegaard is basically orthodox on the events of redemptive history.
  - a) He does question the historicity of the fall (above).
  - b) Somewhat suspicious of “higher biblical criticism;” generally accepts the text as is.
  - c) Many positive statements about Scripture: see Nygren in Geisler, *Biblical Errancy, Kierkegaard's Authority and Revelation*.
2. However, he does not believe that historical knowledge provides an adequate basis for religious certainty.
  - a) History warrants only probability; faith requires certainty.
  - b) History does not necessitate a decision of faith. (Lessing's ditch)
    - (1) Being persuaded of the historicity of the resurrection will not necessarily make you a believer.
    - (2) Thus, no “direct revelation in history” (“revelation” being understood in the subjective sense). No matter how great the evidence, we must decide.
3. Thus the historicity of biblical stories is less important for Kierkegaard than for most evangelicals.
  - a) In comparison with the moment of faith.
  - b) In comparison with the present life of faith: one's faith in Christ, indeed, in the resurrection, ascension, etc. , is shown more by how he lives than by his verbal profession. The meaning of these beliefs is found in their use (cf. Wittgenstein)
  - c) In the moment of faith, we become “contemporaneous” with Christ. The passing of historical time cannot affect this.
4. May faith, for Kierkegaard, be authentic even when its object is false? Consider this famous passage from the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (pp. 179-180): “If one who lives in the midst of Christendom goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a false spirit; and one lives in an idolatrous community prays with the entire passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is there most truth? The one prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol.”
  - a) Note that Kierkegaard uses “true” in two different ways in this passage.
    - (1) “True conception,” “true God” before the first semicolon: objective truth. Kierkegaard never denies the existence of objective truth.

- (2) "Truth" in "where is there most truth?" This is what Kierkegaard calls elsewhere "truth as subjectivity" -- i.e. an authentic, proper personal response to truth through decision. "Doing" the truth.
- b) Thus, Kierkegaard does not concede any objective reality to the object of idolatry, nor question the objective reality of the true God.
- c) At the level of "subjective truth," certainly he is right in his account of the nominal Christian. In an important sense, he is worshipping an idol; for only an idol could respond to his trust in mere formalism.
- d) What of K's account of the pagan? Here it is harder to defend K., and his account certainly opens the door to, e.g., Tillich's equation of passionate doubt with faith, or the claims to faith of the "Christian atheists." On the other hand, there is John 7:17. It is not possible for the Spirit of God to give to a pagan a passionate desire to know the true God, a desire which only at a later point will be fulfilled in a more accurate conceptual understanding? On the Reformed view, this is what God does in regenerating infants.

#### G. Comments

1. Much of Kierkegaard's thought can be given a favorable interpretation from an evangelical point of view, if we keep in mind his distinctive preoccupation with the subjective side of the gospel, with the application rather than the accomplishment of redemption.
  - a) He does not deny the objective truth of the creedal doctrines (on the whole).
  - b) But he (rightly' especially in his situation) stresses the need of appropriating salvation, the hopelessness of one who "assents" but does not trust.
2. It is certainly true that the truth of a proposition or the validity of an argument will not force anyone to accept it, let alone act upon it One must decide to submit to truth.
3. May we define faith as assent to the propositional truth of Christianity? Gordon Clark would say yes, Kierkegaard, no. In my view, it is important to distinguish different strengths of assent.
  - a) It is possible to believe a proposition with little intensity or constancy, perhaps mingled with belief in its opposite (inconsistent), so that the proposition has little effect upon behavior. Clearly such assent is not the life-changing faith of the N.T.
  - b) But if an assent is held strongly and consistently enough to dominate one's behavior (and certainly this is the chief test of whether one believes something), then that assent may be described as "faith." But such an "assent" could also be described as Kierkegaard's "passionate inwardness."

- c) Clark, then, errs in failing to distinguish these different degrees or strengths of assent.
- d) Kierkegaard errs in his assumption that assent is something altogether different from a decision to behave differently. In fact, assent and decision are inseparable. Each involves the other.
- 4. Much psychological and conceptual insight in Kierkegaard's account of the "stages."
- 5. Does faith act in the absence of adequate evidence? No; the evidence is adequate. (Romans 1, I Cor. 15; and Abraham did hear the voice of God.) But is often contrary to what the unbelieving mind is willing to accept as evidence (I Cor. 1-2).
  - a) This does not mean that every believer must be a scholar. The "evidence" is obvious, available to all. Thus we are never faced with the need to "wait until the facts are in."
  - b) Kierkegaard does not distinguish, as we have, between believing and unbelieving criteria for evidence. As such, he implicitly (though not intentionally) grants validity to the unbelieving criteria. He ought to have rejected those criteria rather than rejecting the sufficiency of the evidence.
- 6. Is Christianity "paradoxical?"
  - a) Depends on what you mean. As long as we remember that Kierkegaard does not have "real logical contradiction" in mind, we can accept what he says about Christianity transcending rational categories.
  - b) Does faith involve a "teleological suspension of the ethical?" I would say no for "the ethical" is in Scripture nothing more or less than the will of God. When God declares an exception to a general ethical principle. Now it may seem that all of this amounts to a quibble over the definition of "ethical;" but once we allow for an "ethical" sphere based on something other than God's will, we have conceded the possibility of "neutrality."
- 7. Is faith independent of history?
  - a) In saying that historical study warrants only probable conviction, Kierkegaard is conceding the "neutral," unbelieving concept of history advocated by Lessing. We can be certain about history when our historical information comes to us through God's word.
  - b) Does historical knowledge (even when held with certainty) warrant faith? This is a special case of the question about faith and assent discussed above (3). I would respond to it similarly here.
  - c) May we believe in the absence of a true object? See F, 4 above.
- 8. Is Kierkegaard a liberal or an evangelical? Hard to say.
  - a) Some motifs join him to the liberal tradition:
    - (1) Rationalism/irrationalism: Conceding neutrality to the secular historian, etc., while stressing the limitations of reason in the realm of faith.

- (2) Transcendence/immanence: God wholly other, yet contemporary.
- (3) Subject/object: Emphasizes revelation in the subjective sense as opposed to objective revelation in history.
- b) But there are reasons to regard him as evangelical:
  - (1) He does not proclaim the autonomy of human thought, though like many evangelicals he inadvertently concedes neutrality to secular thought in some areas.
  - (2) He is not, for all his talk of paradox, a “dialectical” thinker in the usual modern sense. His dialectical language is essentially the affirmation of a certain emphasis.
    - (a) Rationalism/irrationalism: He really doesn't believe that faith contradicts rational standards, but he stresses what he conceives to be the limits of reason. Similarly he does not concede autonomy to reason at any level.
    - (b) Transcendence/immanence: He does not deny the objectivity of God's saving acts in history.
    - (c) Subject/object: see b. He emphasizes the subjective, but does not deny the objective.
- 9. His worst error, as I see it, was to concede neutrality to unbelieving thought in various areas (history, philosophy, ethics). Having done that, he had to formulate the faith-relation as something transcending thought, history, ethics. In doing this, he plays into the hands of the liberal tradition, though other evangelicals have done the same.
  - a) His thought, therefore, is not as clearly biblical as it ought to be.
  - b) He has unwittingly given a new set of tools, arguments, to the liberal tradition—tools by which the liberals can make their views appear more convincingly “conservative.”
- 10. Note strong anti-abstractionist thrust. I agree with Kierkegaard that abstract concepts in themselves cannot do justice to individuality. However, whenever we seek to “understand” or “use” abstract concepts, we are already “applying” them to our individual situations (meaning is application.) At that point, we are not dealing merely with abstract concepts; we are dealing with abstract concepts plus our own decisions to use them in certain ways. Thus in practice the use of abstract concepts can determine behavior. At any rate, there is no evidence that any sort of “indirect” communication can do better.

XVI. Alvin Plantinga (1932-), “Reformed epistemology” (Cf. Kelly James Clark)

- A. Plantinga distinguishes between “warrant” (external) and “justification” (internal), interpreting warrant as proper function: our epistemic equipment (senses, reason, etc.) is working properly, and in a situation where it can be expected to produce knowledge.
- B. So Plantinga argues that belief in the Christian God need not be subject to the evidentialist demand. We have the right to believe in God without evidence.

- C. For Christians, belief in God is a foundational belief, “properly basic.”
1. Though arguments can be helpful, this belief is not based on argument.
  2. Positively, it comes through proper function of our cognitive faculties in certain situations. E.g., when we are moved by the starry heavens to believe in God, this belief is not necessarily caused by a cosmological or teleological argument. Rather, something about that situation stimulates our epistemic faculties to believe in God. (Calvin’s *sensus deitatis*).
  3. This belief is defeasible. It can be rebutted by evidence against God’s existence. Of course the believer may also find defeaters to such evidence.
- D. Questions
1. Why should we *take* belief in God as properly basic?
    - a) Plantinga, vs. classical foundationalism, believes that we should not limit basic beliefs to self-evident truths and such. But what criterion is there for choosing beliefs that are properly basic?
    - b) The “Great Pumpkin Objection”: can you take just anything as properly basic?
    - c) Plantinga: the relevant examples of basic and nonbasic beliefs will come from those accepted as such in one’s community.
    - d) Members of other communities may disagree; some will be rationally justified in taking atheism as basic.
    - e) So there will be disagreements that are hard to overcome; but that is not a problem for Christian belief; disagreements are always to be expected.
    - f) Though non-Christians may be justified in taking their beliefs as properly basic, their beliefs are not thereby true or warranted (subjective vs. objective, internal vs. external).
  2. How does this conclusion aid the confidence of the Christian?
    - a) It shows he is rational in taking belief in God as properly basic.
    - b) It does not show that this belief is true.
      - (1) It is defeasible.
      - (2) Those who oppose it also have the right to take their beliefs as properly basic.
    - c) So Plantinga’s religious epistemology requires supplementation to show that Christian belief is not only properly basic, but also “warranted” or true.
      - (1) Plantinga himself has offered arguments to this effect in other writings.
      - (2) This is the role of apologetics as such. In my view, the phrase “Reformed Epistemology Apologetics” (in Steve Cowan, ed., *Five Views of Apologetics*) is a misnomer.
    - d) Scripturally, it is not enough to believe in God as properly basic. God is, rather, the Lord of all and therefore of all reasoning. He is the *presupposition* for all human thought.

- (1) Unlike properly basic beliefs, a presupposition is not defeasible as long as it is held. For it serves as the criterion of truth and falsity, of epistemic justification.
- (2) Those who hold contrary presuppositions (unlike Plantinga's view of those who hold contrary basic beliefs) have no right to hold them. They thereby willfully violate the clear knowledge of the true God revealed to them, and they will be judged for their unbelief. This is a fuller reading of the implications of Calvin's epistemology.

XVII. Gordon H. Clark (1902-1985)

1. Significance: Next to Van Til, Clark is, in my opinion, the most interesting apologist of our century. He excels Van Til in clarity and often in cogency of argument. His critiques of non-Christian thought are among the most useful available, and unlike most apologists, he has an appreciation for the need of presupposing the Word of God in all of thought. There are, however, some serious difficulties in his approach.
2. The Critique of Empiricism
  - a. Clark uses standard rationalistic, Humean and Kantian arguments to show that from sense-experience one can derive no universal or necessary principles.
  - b. Scientific laws do not describe the real world but only summarize a set of experimental operations ("operationalism," P. Bridgman).
  - c. Thus attempts to criticize Christianity on scientific grounds are fallacious.
  - d. It is also impossible to prove the existence of God from the data of sense-experience. The cosmological argument is invalid.
    - (1) Unclear and ambiguous terminology (in part stemming from Aquinas' doctrine of analogy).
    - (2) Kantian and Humean arguments that such proofs go beyond the realm of possible experience; if reduced to their proper sphere they establish at most a finite god.
  - e. Historical evidences "including the Resurrection) prove nothing in themselves. As isolated events, they could mean anything.
3. Presuppositionalism
  - a. Facts, therefore, have no meaning in themselves, but only in relation to others and ultimately to a whole system of thought.

- b. Each system is governed by presuppositions which serve as the ultimate tests of truth within the system.
  - c. Ultimate presuppositions are not demonstrable, for they are the very basis of all demonstration.
  - d. For Christianity, the ultimate presupposition is the propositional truth of Scripture. Only Scripture, in fact may be regarded as genuine knowledge, in contrast with all knowledge allegedly derived from experience.
4. Logical Consistency
- a. How do we decide among competing presuppositions? Ultimately no demonstration is possible (above); but as in geometry, one may seek the most logically consistent and richest system.
  - b. Logic, being universal and necessary, cannot be based on sense-experience. It is the structure of the divine thought itself implanted into man's mind at creation.
  - c. One cannot question the principles of logic and still speak meaningfully.
  - d. Non-Christian systems display contradictions on analysis which are not found in Christianity.
    - (1) Materialism reduces its own thought to matter and motion and thus invalidates itself.
    - (2) The positivist verification principle cannot be verified.
    - (3) Non-Christian systems end up in "skeptical futility."
5. The Criterion of Richness: Though this is less explicit in Clark, he does seem to use this criterion as well.
- a. Cf. Clark's use of the geometric analogy - above, 4, a.
  - b. Lack of such a criterion would produce a problem easily solved with this criterion: Many sets of propositions are logically consistent, but few are adequate to stand up as world views.
  - c. Clark often recommends Christianity as giving satisfactory accounts of ethics, epistemology, language, psychology, etc.
6. Divine "Incomprehensibility"
- a. In Clark's view God's thought is unlike man's
    - (1) Quantitatively (God knows more facts)
    - (2) In mode (God's thought is an eternal intuition)
  - b. But God's thought may be equivalent to man's in "content" -- when God thinks of a rose and man thinks of a rose the same thing is in two minds.
  - c. Else, says Clark, we are lost in skepticism, for we never attain to really true ideas, those in God's mind.

7. The Concept of Faith: Clark reduces faith to intellectual assent, though he finds a richness in the concept of "intellectual assent" not generally acknowledged. He praises Christianity for giving primacy to propositional truth, over against emotion, etc.
8. Evaluation
- a. Empiricism
    - (1) Empiricism is inadequate.
    - (2) Clark is right to use arguments from rationalists, Hume and Kant to show that even from an unbelieving standpoint empiricism will not hold up.
    - (3) It is true also that facts taken in themselves prove nothing. God never intended for them to be taken "in themselves".
    - (4) Clark, however is weak in showing that these difficulties are part of a larger problem, that the problems with empiricism are part of the rationalist/irrationalist dialectic native to sinful thought.
    - (5) Clark acknowledges little positive role for sense experience within the context of the Christian "system". Surely it is the case that when facts are taken, not "in themselves" or "in isolation" but in conjunction with the whole pattern of divine revelation, they yield a clear revelation of God (Ps. 19, Rom. 1, etc.)
  - b. Presuppositions:
    - (1) Clark is inclined to see presuppositions only as propositional axioms, not as "basic commitments" of the whole person. Many of our decisions, however, arise from commitments which we have never expressed propositionally.
    - (2) To say that ultimate presuppositions are not demonstrable is to say that the evidence for Christianity is, in the end, only probable. On the contrary, these presuppositions are demonstrable by argument which, though circular, incorporates premises from outside themselves (cf. "Doctrine of the Knowledge of God").
  - c. Logic
    - (1) Human logic has a history; there have been many different systems. Which of these is Clark's ultimate test of truth?

- (a) Not just the law of non-contradiction in the abstract. Clark knows that rules for the application of this law must also be agreed on if the law is to be useful as a criterion.
  - (b) Clark holds to Aristotle's system over against that of Bertrand Russell. But does this not elevate Aristotle to a status equivalent to Scripture, namely as the supplier of an ultimate test of truth?
  - (c) When questioned as to why he accepts Aristotle over Russell, Clark referred to one of his own papers. When asked whether he was sure that his paper was right Clark replied, "If it isn't, no predication is possible." Does this not elevate, not only Aristotle, but Clark himself, to quasi-canonical status, thus compromising the sufficiency of Scripture which Clark elsewhere is zealous to guard?
- (2) Logic cannot be applied unless we know the meanings of the words in the sentences to which the logic is applied. But learning the meanings of words is inevitably an empirical affair. Cf. Poythress, *Philosophy, Science, and the Sovereignty of God*, 199ff.
- (3) Why is it that the truths of logic appear to be "universal and necessary" and thus in a different class from other truths? The question leads us into a highly difficult area. Ultimately, I would say that these truths seem unexceptional because we adopt them as presuppositions of our systems at fairly basic levels (cf. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"). -But if this is the case, then for the Christian Scripture must be seen as a more basic presupposition than any logical theory. Scripture does indeed teach that God is wise, and hence logical; but it does not validate any human system of logic as being infallible. Thus we must beware of putting any such system on too high a plane.
- (4) Clark is rather too confident in his ability to resolve all apparent contradictions within Christianity. If we come across an apparent

contradiction which neither Clark nor we can resolve, are we on that account to abandon our faith? That would not, in my view, be warranted.

- (5) Clark's logical critiques of non-Christian systems:
- (a) Often these are excellent, and we can use them to show one sort of problem which arises from the rationalist/irrationalist dialectic.
  - (b) However, logical problems are not the only sorts of problems worth exploring.
  - (c) And, as in his critique of empiricism, he often fails to trace the logical contradictions to their roots in the general structure of unbelief.
  - (d) No non-Christian will give up his whole system because of one apparent contradiction which he cannot resolve, nor ought he, any more than a Christian ought to.
  - (e) Clark often misleads the unbeliever into thinking that logic is one point of "neutral" common ground which Christians and non-Christians share. Of course, Christians and non-Christians do assent to the same formulations of the laws of logic. But they apply the "laws of thought" in such radically different ways that they cannot be said to agree on a common meaning for them (meaning = application).
- d. Richness: Here too there is much good material. Clark presents Christianity as speaking to all areas of human life. However, he often appears to concede to the unbeliever the capacity to judge this richness in terms of his own principles.
- e. Incomprehensibility
- (1) The notion of "sameness in content" is extremely confused. Cf. Frame, *Van Til the Theologian*, 21-23.
  - (2) Clark's purpose, to avoid skepticism by insisting that our thoughts "agree" with God's, is laudable. To say without qualification that there is no continuity between God's thoughts

and ours is a denial of the divine image and is a deistic notion.

- (3) But Clark's opponents (including Van Til) also have a point: the creator/creature distinction must be preserved; at no point may we suggest that God and man are composed of the same "stuff."
- (4) Points ii and iii were intentionally phrased in vague terms. Scripture does not enter into precise detail as to how God's mind differs from ours. However, we must confess that since God is creator and Lord, there is a Lordly quality to his thinking which does not pertain to any of our thinking. A "qualitative difference".
- (5) Clark's problem is that he puts very little emphasis on the difference between God's mind and ours. He is so anxious to save us from skepticism that he makes Aristotle's logic equivalent to God's. But if a human logical system can be equivalent to God's, what is to prevent us from saying that human knowledge in some other field is equivalent to God's (cf. above, c, iii)? This sort of approach certainly contradicts such passages as Rom. 11:33-36. In fact, if as Clark says, facts get their meaning from a total system, and if (as Clark seems to deny, but I think plausible) logical truths are facts, and if God and man share the same logical truths, then we would have to conclude that God and man share the same total system, and there is no difference between divine and human thought.

f. Faith

- (1) The "primacy of the intellect" is not, in my view, a Scriptural notion. Cf. "Doctrine of the Knowledge of God."
- (2) The relation between faith and intellectual assent is a complex question. One can, of course, make them equivalent if one defines the latter broadly enough. Indeed, it is not possible to "assent" fully to God's truth and yet disobey him (cf. my remarks on the devil's irrationality). Yet people do assent to true propositions about God without having true faith, and thus Clark's way of putting it can cause confusion. Certainly one must not

intellectualize faith so as to rule out regeneration of the emotions, will, etc., from its scope.

- g. Summary: Despite many good emphases and helpful arguments, Clark's work contains too much reasoning on a would-be-neutral basis, shows an inadequate grasp of the distinctions between creator and creature and between Christian and non-Christian reasoning. His intellectualism confuses some biblical teachings and unduly restricts the material he can bring to bear upon the non-Christian.

### XVIII. Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987)

- A. Bible-believing, Reformed
- B. Creation
  1. All facts pre-interpreted by God, so no "brute" or uninterpreted facts.
  2. Facts and laws are correlative. Neither exist without the other.
  3. The world is one and many in analogy to the Trinity. So neither unity nor multiplicity is ultimate or without the other. Vs. extremes of realism and nominalism.
- C. Analogical Knowledge
  1. Aquinas argued that the language we use about God can never be literal (univocal), but bears some *analogy* to God's actual nature. Van Til neither affirmed nor denied this, though he was critical of Aquinas's "analogy of being."
  2. For Van Til, analogical knowledge is simply "thinking God's thoughts after him," which for Van Til could mean only "thinking according to God's revelation."
  3. In Van Til's view, our thoughts are never *identical* to God's, contra Clark.
    - a) God's thoughts are original, ours derivative.
    - b) God's thoughts have divine attributes (eternal, infinite, omniscient, etc.), while ours do not.
    - c) God's subjective experience of thinking is very different from ours.
    - d) We are called to think as servants, in subjection to another; God thinks as Lord.
    - e) But in my view Van Til does not deny that God and man can affirm the same propositions, though he was accused of denying this.
  4. The "analogical system"
    - a) Van Til affirms the use of logic in developing a system of thought.
    - b) But because God is incomprehensible, there are "apparent contradictions" in his revelation, that we may not be able to

resolve, such as the goodness of God and the reality of evil, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, etc.

- c) These should motivate caution in our logical deductions. We should constantly look at the explicit teachings of Scripture, lest our deductions lead us into conflict with God's revelation.
- d) "Multiperspectivalism:" each doctrine includes the others and the whole.

#### D. Presuppositions

1. Not an apriorist in the sense of disparaging empirical or a posteriori knowledge. As indicated above, Van Til insisted on the correlativity between facts and logic.
2. But he did maintain that God's Word has absolute authority over all aspects of human life, including thinking and reasoning. So our knowledge of Scripture must govern our understanding of everything else.
3. This must be the case even when we are witnessing to non-Christians. Especially then, for to do otherwise is not a consistent witness.
4. A presupposition may be defined as a belief that takes precedence over other beliefs.
5. An *ultimate* presupposition is one that takes precedence over *all* other beliefs. It will be the basic commitment of one's heart.

#### E. Evidence

1. Van Til does not deny (as often accused), but strongly affirms the legitimacy in using evidence to verify the truth of revelation.
2. However, that evidence must be used in a biblical way, not as "brute fact," but as facts created and directed by God.
3. This introduces circularity into theological and apologetic reasoning.
  - a) Van Til warrants circularity only at one point: when we are arguing for God, the very criterion of truth.
  - b) All other systems must do the same. The rationalist can offer only a circular argument for the validity of reason, etc.
  - c) Can such circular arguments be persuasive?
    - (1) Yes, because this is the way God intended for our minds to think, in order to reach him.
    - (2) "Narrowly" circular arguments (e.g. "God exists because God exists") are not persuasive.
    - (3) But we can broaden the circle by bringing in facts, e.g., "Archaeological discoveries support the reliability of the Book of Acts." Of course, we seek to analyze the archaeological data in accord with Scripture, so the argument is still circular. But exposing an inquirer to this data is often epistemically beneficial.
  - d) In another sense, the argument is linear: from God's rationality, to human faith, to the theistic argument, to the theistic conclusion.

#### F. The Noetic Effects of Sin

1. Van Til put much emphasis on Romans 1.
  - a) The unbeliever knows God clearly.
  - b) But he suppresses that truth, exchanges it for a lie, etc.
2. Scripture often emphasizes the antithesis between the wisdom of the world and the truth of God, between the mind of the flesh and that of the spirit, etc.
3. For Van Til, the antithesis is absolute “in principle.” Satan and his unbelieving servants oppose the truth of God, though they know it is true. This is almost the definition of irrationalism.
4. But in fact Satan and human unbelievers do often utter true statements, even about God.
  - a) The devils admit that God is one and that Christ is “the holy one of God.”
  - b) The Pharisees were relatively orthodox Old Testament believers, but were children of the devil.
5. Van Til tries various ways of formulating the antithesis that must be judged inadequate:
  - a) The unbeliever is obligated to know God, but doesn’t actually know him (contradicts Rom. 1:21).
  - b) The unbeliever is in contact with God’s revelation, but always interprets it wrongly. (But Scripture presents Satan and unbelievers as making true statements.)
  - c) The unbeliever knows God is a formal sense. (The meaning of this is unclear.)
  - d) The unbeliever knows God, but doesn’t love him. (True, but isn’t there also a defect in his actual knowledge?)
6. In my view, there is no truth that the unbeliever cannot utter. The antithesis is rather to be found
  - a) In the unbeliever’s overall project, of joining Satan to overthrow God’s sovereignty. This project is so irrational that it infects his thinking in profound ways.
  - b) In the unbeliever’s consistent purpose of attacking the truth of God, both in his own consciousness, in others, and in society.

#### G. Rationalism and Irrationalism

1. As the result of sin, the unbeliever tries to combine belief in his intellectual self-sufficiency (rationalism) with belief that there is no ultimate rationality to the world (irrationalism).
2. This pattern can be seen through the history of thought (see above), and it serves as a powerful tool for criticism of non-Christian thinkers.

#### H. Van Til’s Apologetic

1. The “traditional method”
  - a) Assumes human intellectual autonomy.
  - b) Fails to presuppose God’s revelation, sometimes for fear of circularity.

- c) Assumes that the world is intelligible apart from God, and furnishes premises by which God's revelation can be proved true.
  - d) Argues only that Christianity is "probable," which, in Van Til's view, denies the clarity of revelation. (JF: I don't agree here. A claim of probability may simply be an admission of the limitations of one's own argument. The evidence, revelation, is necessarily clear; our arguments, our formulations of the evidence, are not necessarily so.)
  - e) JF: Van Til is correct to find these errors in *much* of the apologetic tradition, but I find presuppositional tendencies there also. The tradition is not consistently autonomist, and its errors do not invalidate every argument.
2. The presuppositional method
- a) Frankly deny intellectual autonomy, presuppose God's revelation.
  - b) Insist that God's revelation is, indeed, the only source of meaning and rationality in the world.
  - c) Argue "transcendentally"
    - (1) Show that unbeliever is presupposing, rather than proving, his position.
    - (2) Show that the truth of Scripture is the very condition of meaningfulness and rationality.
    - (3) Show that to deny this leads to chaos and irrationality.
3. JF Reservations:
- a. Can the transcendental argument function without subsidiary arguments of a more traditional kind?
  - b. "Christian theism is a unit." Is it necessary or possible to prove everything at once? Cannot piecemeal arguments accomplish something?
  - c. Do traditional arguments necessarily presuppose non-Christian concepts of "cause," etc.?
  - d. How does one prove all the details of Christian theology transcendentally?
  - e. Vs. "magic bullet." No argument guaranteed to persuade everybody.
  - f. Must we bring up the issue of presuppositions in every apologetic encounter?
  - g. Must a transcendental argument always be negative, rather than positive?
  - h. Must all apologetic arguments claim absolute certainty, rather than probability?
  - i. What is the difference, concretely, between appealing to an unbeliever's suppressed knowledge and appealing to his/her false thinking?
  - j. "Presuppositionalism of the heart."