Fragments from the Editor's Laptop

Before anything else, I have the privilege of expressing my gratitude to two people. I want to thank Chad Meister, the midwife of this journal, for all the work he and his assistants have done over the last four and a half years. Second, I wish to thank Mr. Harold Rawlings and the Rawlings Foundation for once again providing significant financial support for this journal.

The following thoughts were certainly stimulated by the recent debate concerning the nature of biblical inerrancy. However, they are intended to be a response to a question that was raised by a number of young scholars on both sides of the issue. Thus, they are not intended as a defense of my personal position, which, as one of the founders of this society and now as the editor of its journal, can safely be assumed to be in favor of accepting the full inerrancy of the Bible. However, I would like to provide an encouraging reply to the question of whether accepting this position shackles one's ability to carry out profitable and meaningful research. My answer is no, you have not cut yourself off from the opportunity to make serious scholarly contributions. I would like to emphasize that your creative work based on this position are welcome and needed.

Creativity involves hard work that begins by staying true to the principles to which one has bound oneself and not seeking refuge in easy escape routes— shortcuts that are frequently provided by the academy. It is easier to write textbooks based on consensus than on the current state of research, and it is easy for a scholar to make her conclusions come out to match those provided at the end of the book, metaphorically speaking. It is also relatively easy to declare the textbooks to be wrong based on all-too-hastily conducted research. Scholarship that impeaches its own data is not very helpful.

As it turns out, the self-refuting academic world that rejects the authority of its subject matter, the Bible, can become passionate in its rejection of sound reason. "If Peter actually wrote 2 Peter," a New Testament scholar declared to me fervently, "we need to rethink everything that we mean by the 'authorship' of a book of the Bible." Indeed, if so, the time to do so would appear to be now, as soon as possible.

In many cases, contemporary Biblical scholarship makes it easy on itself by cutting through various Gordian knots. Are there problems reconciling Christ's prophecies with events as we understand them at this point? While the scholar who accepts full inerrancy must wrestle with the issues, the person who does not embrace divine inspiration with all that it implies can safely say that Jesus must have been wrong and that it was typical for people back when the gospels were written to say or invent spiritually helpful mendacities.

Are there events recorded in biblical narrative that challenge our credulity? There are many passages in the Bible that are not easy to accept, not only because they involve supernatural elements, but because they do not seem to harmonize with various aspects of our theologies. They may require much reflection and synthesis. In the meantime, another contemporary theologian may wave his all-purpose wand over a passages and relegate it to the realm of fiction. In my opinion, the true scholar is the one who may lose hours of sleep struggling with difficult passages because he is not ready to concede his data or his principles.

Thus, I would like to say the following to young or older scholars who may feel afraid that they are settling for second best as they acknowledge the plenary inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, not as a conclusion but as a starting point for their scholarship. Whatever choice you make, the easy way to go will be to find your conclusions in the answers at the end of the book. I am not saying that this is not a prevalent practice, but many people go that way, whether liberal or conservative. If you are choosing to be a genuine Bible-based scholar without simply rephrasing what has been said already, you have definitely chosen the road less traveled on, and you can make a lasting scholarly contribution by staying true to sound principles and to the fundamental data. Creativity is synonymous neither with novelty nor with overstepping the rules, let alone—as I said—with undercutting the integrity of your subject matter. It is simply not the case that holding to inerrancy entails coming up with predetermined answers or that to avoid the problem of prepackaged answers one has to redefine biblical inerrancy in some new way. But one does have to think, learn, struggle, study and forego easy applause.

For a creative theologian or biblical scholar, biblical inerrancy is the Ariadne's thread that helps us not lose our way through the labyrinth. If we let go of it, we may become prey to the Minotaur, and, if we look for a better thread, it may be one supplied by the Minotaur himself. To be sure, if we merely cling to the thread and do not walk ahead, we will never be able to attain our goals, and if we do not make use of the thread we have laid out along the way, we cannot return, and our success is short-term and meaningless. We must venture forth into the

dark and confusing passages, and we must confront the Minotaur. And by hanging on to Ariadne's thread, we will come out safely and successfully.

My vision, as this particular spool of thread has found itself into my hand, is that this journal will set an example of the best scholarship, based on an unmitigated commitment to the truth and trustworthiness of the Bible. The general topic is apologetics, a practice that can include contributions from almost any area of academics, and I hope that we will increase the diversity of fields from where we receive contributions. At the same time, one cannot practice apologetics sincerely as long as we are treating the truth of Scripture as a so-far-unfalsified hypothesis.

This issue is a volume born in transition. It has been a challenge to climb into this saddle, particularly since I was out of the country when the transfer transpired. I have tried to do justice to all of the commitments made prior to my taking over as editor. This is a position which I shall cherish, but which needed to find its own new space in my life. If I have left out an article or review that had been previously approved, I was not aware of it, and all I can do at this point is to apologize and to promise that I will give it consideration for the next issue.

Performing this task for the first time without assistants or preparation has led me to believe that, as the journal matures, it is helpful to all parties concerned to establish some ground rules. Articles should follow the Chicago standard. A typical footnote to a book looks like this:

Author, *Title of Work* (City: Publisher, Date), #. Note that there is no "p." before the page number.

"Ibid" means "the same," and it can only be used when it refers to both the author and title of the work preceding it. It is not italicized, and it is followed by a period. If a new page number is indicated, the period can be followed by a comma and a page number. It cannot be used if there is an intervening reference. No other Latin bibliographical terms (*idem*, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*), so precious to high school English teachers of a previous generation, are permitted.

The second time that a work is mentioned, please state the surname of the author and an unequivocal abbreviation of the title, followed by a comma and the page number.

A standard reference to a journal article or serial work looks like this:

Name, "Title" *Name of Journal* XX/x (Month, Year): ##, where XX is the volume number and x is the specific issue for publications that come out more often than one year.

Submissions that are clearly out of sync with this standard will be returned to the author for reformatting prior to review.

It has been a custom of the society that the new volume of the journal be published at the time of the annual meeting, which is usually in April. Thus, a submission deadline of February 1 of that year is not unreasonable, and, if the article requires extensive external reading, publication in that year's issue can still not be guaranteed.

Please also note the particular instruction for book reviews on page

Apologetics seems to be popular among Christians today. I would like for the journal to be representative of the International Society of Christian Apologetics, and I would like the Society to be the backbone of apologetics, the place where new useful scholarship appears. Thus, an article that is rich on information is preferable to one that provides a slightly different angle on an argument that has been treated numerous times or one that essentially synthesizes familiar themes. As you contemplate writing an article for this journal or prepare an already written one for submission, please ask yourself: What are people going to learn from this piece that they cannot pick up anywhere else? It's the question I will be asking when I start reading it.

Winfried Corduan, PhD

A SHORT AND EASIE METHOD WITH POSTMODERNISTS

John Warwick Montgomery[1]

I. Introduction

Our title is derived from a celebrated and often reprinted 18th-century work of apologetics: Charles Leslie's *A Short and Easie Method with the Deists: Wherein the Certainty of the Christian Religion Is Demonstrated*.[2] It is our contention that the detailed and often prolix contemporary attempts to refute Postmodernism have generally produced more heat than light. We also believe that the proper approach is hardly that of John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (*Humble Apologetics*), where unnecessary concessions to the Postmodernist mentality weaken the classic case for Christianity.[3] The right method to follow is not that of the aphorism, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em," but a realisation that Postmodernism is epistemologically flawed from the outset and that even its advocates cannot consistently live by its worldview.

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2. 8th ed., London: J. Applebee, 1723.
3. See the trenchant review by Canadian judge Dallas Miller in 4/3 *Global Journal of Classical Theology,* October, 2004 (www.phc.edu).

II. The Nature of Postmodernism

Postmodernism, admittedly, is an amorphous phenomenon—rather like the New Age mentality: exceedingly difficult to pin down owing to the fact that its adherents and fellow travellers do not maintain a single credo. But one of the most helpful analyses of the phenomenon has been provided by D. E. Polkinghorne, who identifies four basic themes: (1) foundationlessness, (2) fragmentariness, (3) constructivism, and (4) neo-pragmatism.

> The tacit assumptions of this epistemology of practice are: (a) there is no epistemological ground on which the indubitable truth of knowledge statements can be established; (b) a body of knowledge consists of fragments of understanding, not a system of logically integrated statements; (c) knowledge is a construction built out of cognitive schemes and embodied interactions with the environment; and (d) the test of a knowledge statement is its pragmatic usefulness in accomplishing a task, not its derivation from an approved set of methodological rules.[4]

The Postmodernist, in maintaining that no concrete epistemic foundation exists, focuses on the immediate and the local, not on any general truths (since there are none); for him or her, the only reality is the product of one's personal constructs and the question is never whether *x* is true but whether by accepting *x* one will arrive at a satisfactory outcome. Advocates of this viewpoint include American psychologists George A. Kelly (creator of "PCT"—Personal Construct Theory)[5] and Kenneth J. Gergen.[6]   Postmodernism has impacted not only psychological counselling, but also the wider spheres of law, literature, philosophy, theology, and the media.[7]

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4.   D. E. Polkinghorne, "Postmodern Epistemology of Practice," in S. Kvale (ed.), *Psychology and Postmodernism* (London: Sage, 1992), pp. 146-47.
5.   George A. Kelly, *The Psychology of Personal Constructs* (New York: Norton, 1955).
6.   K. J. Gergen, "Toward a Postmodern Psychology," in Kvale, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-30. On Postmodernism in general, see Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism; A Brief Insight* (New York and London: Sterling, 2002).
7.   Cf. Montgomery, "Speculation vs. Factuality: An Analysis of Modern Unbelief," in his *Christ As Centre and Circumference* (Bonn, Germany: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2012), sec. 1.

III. Historical Excursus

How did such a viewpoint come about? And how could it have gained influence in a western world that prides itself on scientific objectivity? The answer lies in Luther's profound insight that the history of our fallen race is that of a drunk reeling from one wall to the other.

In the 18th century, European thought, especially in Germany, jettisoned the Christocentric insights of the Protestant Reformation for so-called "Enlightenment" rationalism.[8]   By the 19th century, philosophers—the most influential being Hegel and the post-Hegelians—had convinced themselves that they could arrive at the very "essence" of universal truth by unaided human reason.

In reaction, Danish lay theologian Søren Kierkegaard saw such efforts as *hubris.* He recognized that it is a chimerical dream to think that one can arrive at the essence of the universe by human reason.   Because mankind's finite condition is characterized by *Angst* and estrangement, it is impossible to get beyond "*Existenz*"—one's own subjective condition. The only solution is to find Christ, the source of salvation, at the heart of one's personal existence.

But the existential movement originating with Kierkegaard developed chiefly along atheistic lines in the writings of 20th century philosophers Heidegger and Sartre. Kierkegaard's remedy ('truth is subjectivity") for the disease of rational idealism turned out to be as bad as the disease itself, for it spawned a subjectivistic perspective that has impacted almost every aspect of modern society.[9]

Consider a few prominent examples. In philosophy of science: the Kuhn thesis (progress in science is the result of changes in philosophical perspective,

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8. See Montgomery, "From Enlightenment to Extermination," *Christianity Today,* 11 October 1974; reprinted in Montgomery, *The Shaping of America* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1981) and in *Christians in the Public Square* (Calgary, Alberta: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology and Public Policy, 1996).

9. The proper solution is to recognize that, although we cannot by unaided human reason arrive at the meaning of the universe as a whole, we do indeed have the ability to investigate particular facts (in science, history, etc.)—facts such as the historicity, character and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One thereby encounters *special revelation*—biblical truth—which provides by God's grace and not by human rationality an objective grounding for subjective salvation and insight into ultimate issues. I have developed this in my many apologetics writings.

not the consequence of newer or better objective evidence). In law: the Critical Legal Studies movement ("CLS"), holding that legal texts have no inherent, objective meaning; we are thus to employ them politically so as to achieve our personal, subjective ideals of justice.[10] Literature: the "hermeneutical circle," which asserts that the meaning of a text can never be established apart from the subjective stance of the interpreter (cf. James Joyce's *Ulysses*). Music: the atonal (Schoenberg). Art: post-impressionism, Dada, and their successors (Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase).[11]

In such a subjective cultural context, the appearance of Postmodernism seems entirely comprehensible—perhaps even inevitable.

IV. Story-telling

One of the most common (and frustrating) aspects of holding a discussion with a Postmodernist is his or her insistence on "telling one's own story." You are allowed—indeed, encouraged—to tell your story: let us say, the story of your conversion, based on your solid conviction of the factual truth of the Christian gospel. This is then followed by the Postmodernist's story, which, needless to say, is incompatible with the position you have just set forth.

This incompatibility, however, does not bother the Postmodernist to any observable degree. Why? because for him or her there is no single, objective truth. Each of us constructs reality as he or she sees fit, and the issue is simply the pragmatic effects of those constructs in one's experience.

One is reminded of existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre's account of his encounter with a young resistant during the German occupation of France in World War II. The young man very much wanted to escape through Spain to join De Gaulle and the Free French in London, but his mother was dependent on him. What should he do? Sartre's response was: "Decide! There are no omens in the world, and, if there were, we would give them their meaning."[12] We are not told the young man's reaction to these words; we expect he went away mumbling: "That's the last time I go to an existentialist for advice!"

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10. Montgomery, *Christ Our Advocate* (Bonn, Germany: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2002), pp. 32-33.
11. Cf. Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1970).
12. J.-P. Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Philosophical Library, 2000).

The fundamental problem here lies in the fact that (to paraphrase George Orwell), although all stories are equal, some are more equal than others. That is to say, there are sublime (and true) stories, and there are horrific (and damnable) stories. Would we really be willing to accept Hitler's story as set out in *Mein Kampf* and treat it as having the same validity as the story of Jesus' loving sacrifice of himself on the Cross for the sins of the world? Surely, there are objective ethical values that cannot be ignored. Descriptively, the world is full of stories; normatively, they must be distinguished on the basis of the moral quality and truth-value (if any) they represent.

A trenchant critic of Postmodernist therapy writes—and the very same point applies *mutatis mutandis* in the theological realm:

> How can a person be encouraged to acknowledge truly unpleasant truths, especially those sordid, unflattering facts which may lack the compensation of a tragic dimension, if one assumes that there is no distinction between truth and mere fiction—but only stories about stories about stories? And what is to prevent psychotherapy from turning into an elaborate workshop for rationalization, a place for spinning self-justificatory fantasies and fostering all the subtle complacencies of narcissistic entitlement and self-satisfaction?[13]

And beyond the realm of "self-justificatory fantasies" rises the spectre of political power. Those who have the power are in a position to choose the story that is heard and prevails. Where there is no objective standard for distinguishing true from false stories, those with power will make the choice—excluding, imprisoning, killing those who disagree.

V. The Law of Non-contradiction

The Postmodern error cuts far deeper than psychological and ethical considerations. The Postmodernist's refusal to reject stories in contradiction with other stories betrays a solipsist epistemology: there is no objective world; only worlds constructed by the storytellers exist, and these pose no problem even when in mutual contradiction.

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13. Louis A. Sass, "The Epic of Disbelief: The Postmodernist Turn in Contemporary Psychoanalysis," in Kvale, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

The difficulty with such an approach is that no one can consistently live that way—and, as Francis Schaeffer was wont to say, a philosophy that even its adherents cannot live by cannot possibly be true. The Eastern mystic may declare that the material world is *maya*—illusion—but will still treat it as real and employ a map to find a Chinese restaurant. The adherent of the cult of Christian Science may declare pain to be unreal but will still scream when stuck with a pin—declaring (at minimum) that "the illusion of pain was almost as bad as the pain would have been."

The Postmodernist, whilst declaring that mutually self-contradictory stories can all be true, nonetheless assumes the law of non-contradiction. He or she hardly believes—to take an obvious example—that the story being told at the moment can simultaneously be true *and* false. If told that he or she just said non-*x* when *x* had been in fact declared, the Postmodernist would certainly attempt to correct the listener.[14]

Let us consider a practical illustration both of the ethical point raised in the previous section of this paper and of the logical point just made. A Teetotalers Club and a Drinkers Club have mutually exclusive membership requirements. There is, however, suspicion that the same individual or individuals may have joined *both* societies.   A computer programme is therefore developed to determine if this is the case: [15]

```
program Hypocrite (OUTPUT, First, Second);

{Identifies persons who have hypocritically joined
both a Drinkers} {Club and a Teetotalers Club, and
demonstrates the absolute} {necessity of the law of
non-contradiction in all areas of life,} {practical as
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14. Cf. the discussion of multiple logics in Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-theologicus* (4[th] ed.; Bonn, Germany: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2009), proposition 2.2.
15. The following programme is set out in the standard Pascal language—as are programmes on the author's website: www.jwm.christendom.co.uk To run this programme, one must employ a Pascal compiler; we suggest THINK Pascal 4.5 (available free on the web). It is worth noting that all computer operations (not just this one) rely on the law of non-contradiction: "The entire computer concept is founded on the law of non-contradiction: in binary computer language you must choose 'yes' or 'no'—a 'dialectic answer' is no answer at all. There are no neo-orthodox computers" (Montgomery, *Computers, Cultural Change, and the Christ* [Wayne, NJ: Christian Research Institute, 1969], p. 15).

well as theoretical, i.e., the principle at the root}
{of all formal logic that A cannot = ~A at the same
time under the} {same conditions. The programme will
name the first common entry} {appearing on the two
membership lists; only after deleting that} {name from
the lists and rerunning the programme will a second}
{hypocrite be identified--and so on. When all common
names have} {been removed, the programme will show no
result; this will} {likewise be the case should no
hypocritical common member of the} {two organisations
exist. *Membership pledge of the Drinkers Club:*} {"I
promise in the name of St Paul to imbibe an alcoholic
drink} {each day--a fine French wine if possible."
Teetotalers' pledge:} {"I promise in the name of Carry
Nation never to drink an} {alcoholic beverage, even
for my stomach's sake."}

```
  var
  First, Second: TEXT;
  Name1, Name2: string;

  begin

  WRITELN('Object: to identify at least one hypocrite
who has joined both the Drinkers and the Teetotalers
Club.');

  RESET(First, 'drinkersfile');
  RESET(Second, 'temperancefile');

  READLN(First, Name1);
  READLN(Second, Name2);

  repeat

  if Name1 < Name2 then
  begin
  READLN(First, Name1);
  end;

  if Name2 < Name1 then
```

```
begin
READLN(Second, Name2);
end;

until Name1 = Name2;
```

WRITE('A hypocrite, whose name appears on both
lists, is: ', Name1, '!');

   end.

The membership lists of the two clubs are as follows; they are fed into the above programme as text files:

Drinkers Club Membership List

```
Gangee (Sam)
Johnson (Samuel)
Luther (Martin)
Montgomery (John)
Schlonk (Alphonso)
Twist (Oliver)
Xavier (Rodney)
```

Teetotalers Club Membership List

```
Falwell (Jerry)
Heartacre (Silvia)
Loopy (David)
McAgony (Alister)
Perfect (Wholesome)
Schlonk (Alphonso)
Ziltch (Methusula)
```

The programme "Hypocrite" is then run and the result is as follows:

Output Result of Running the "Hypocrite" Programme:

   Object: to identify at least one hypocrite on the member lists of the Drinkers Club and the Teetotalers Club.

A hypocrite, whose name appears on both lists, is:

Schlonk (Alphonso)!

It is our contention that the Postmodernist, no more than the anti-Postmodernist, would be satisfied with Schlonk's conduct and would insist that he cease to be a member of at least one of the two societies.

VI. But Aren't We Dealing with "Religion"?

The objector may well retort that our examples appear compelling, but they operate in the non-religious area—and in matters of religion it may well be proper to allow a multiplicity of diverse (even contradictory) viewpoints, since religious assertions are metaphysical in nature.

Our ethical example (Hitler's story) shows, however, the interlocking of ordinary life with absolute moral values.   Indeed, there is no bright line separating religion from other spheres of life. All knowledge is interlocked. Our divisions of the pie of knowledge are arbitrary—to facilitate study and because no one can master all areas of thought. Physics slides into chemistry, chemistry into the biological sciences, biology into psychology, psychology into sociology, sociology into history, history into literature; etc., etc.

And where the Christian religion is concerned, earth and heaven conjoin. God reveals himself in ordinary human history and human experience—through prophets and apostles and principally through the incarnation of His Son for the salvation of the human race.   Thus the same law of non-contradiction that informs ordinary life will apply equally to ultimate questions of religious truth.

As C. S. Lewis put it, the Christ-symbol Aslan and the false god Tash cannot be blended into a "Tashlan."[16] There is one and only one proper foundation. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). There is only one saving story, namely the gospel story. As Jesus said expressly: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). And thus, from the days of the Apostles, the church has always proclaimed: " Neither is there salvation in any other: for there

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16. In *The Last Battle,* the concluding volume of the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"
(Acts 4:12).

Philosophical Paradoxes of Darwinian Evolutionary Naturalism

Khaldoun A. Sweis[1]

Introduction

Darwinian evolutionary naturalism (DEN) is the strongest force for the legitimate expression of research in the sciences or the humanities today.   I attempt to address some issues that DEN still needs to take under consideration. This paper is divided into three parts.

 Part 1 is a struggle to find a coherent definition of DEN as it is currently understood. The common thread I find running through all definitions is the following: *DEN is a belief or research paradigm that excludes any teleological, theological or supernatural explanations for the elucidation of phenomena in the universe.*   It assumes that the best explanations are causal, non-purposive explanations, ultimately depending on the causal regularities of the physical sciences. Moreover, if anything cannot be explained by the machinery of the hard sciences, such as consciousness, morality, or beauty, then it either is a mystery waiting to be resolved by the hard sciences, or it is epiphenomenal , or it does not exist except as a social or linguistic convention.

In Part 2, I address the supposed unscientific presuppositions of DEN. This discussion leads us to the question of scientific methodology.   Famous philosopher of science Karl Popper wrote, "the criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability, or testability." If we cannot, or are not allowed to, consider the falsifiability or refutability of DEN, then, according to Pooper, it would not qualify as scientific in nature. Does this critique have merit? Is DEN a non-scientific theory?

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Finally in Part 3, I articulate some arguments against DEN and its community by following the leads of Alvin Plantinga and Richard Taylor, (whose arguments are different than the ones raised by C. S. Lewis). This line of argumentation states that, if our cognitive faculties have arisen by purely natural, unguided forces, then, although they can be trusted to arrive at pragmatic conclusions, they cannot be trusted to arrive at truthful conclusions. The point is that beliefs that have survival value are not the same as beliefs that are reasonable or have a purpose. This distinction is something that proponents of DEN need to address to make DEN a more reasonable hypothesis.

The main hypothesis of my thesis is taken from a line often quoted by the literary character Sherlock Holmes:

That process' [of finding things out], said I, 'starts upon the supposition that when you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. It may well be that several explanations remain, in which case one tries test after test until one or other of them has a convincing amount of support.'[2]

I will show that naturalistic explanations of consciousness are impossible and thus ought to be eliminated. Then, whatever remains, however improbable, for example that Descartes was right and that our consciousness is instantiated in another immaterial substance, must be the truth. It may well be that several other explanations remain, but I will show that substance dualism has a convincing amount of support which is sufficient to bring it back into rigorous academic discussions.

1. Defining Naturalism

I begin with a theory referred to as *materialism*, *scientific materialism*, *ontological physicalism*, *methodological naturalism* or *scientism*. At times different authors make a distinction between *naturalism* and *scientism (scientism*

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[2] Robson, *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*, ed. Doyle, Arthur Conan (Oxford, England: Oxford University, 1999), 169. There are several different versions of this saying in Arthur Conan Doyle's works on Holmes: ""Eliminate all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth." in A. C. Doyle, A Study in Scarlet (Oxford, England: unknown, 1994), 154, and "'How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?" on pg. 195; "'We must fall back upon the old axiom that when all other contingencies fail, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth." in A. C. Doyle, *His Last Bow*, ed. Edwards, Owen Dudley (Oxford; New York: unknown, 1993), 58

is also called *materialism* or *physicalism*). I will be addressing these differences within the different views of naturalism itself. However, for the purpose of this thesis, all the above will be referred under the umbrella of *naturalism*.

What is naturalism? There is no uniform agreement on what it is, but I can at least present a basic understanding of this theory.

David Armstrong says that naturalism is "the doctrine that reality consists of nothing but a single all-embracing spatial-temporal system."[3] Some naturalists do not entirely deny that ghosts, angels and such entities or forces exist, but merely that one cannot use them within scientific explanations, and that they are, thus, for all practical purposes, irrelevant and might as well not exist. However, there still remain a few writers who outright deny any non-natural aspects of the universe. This group includes Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, Professor of Philosophy at Tufts University. They are part of a recent organization whose whole point is the denial of anything supernatural, calling themselves the "Brights." Dennett writes:

> The time has come for us brights to come out of the closet. What is a bright? A bright is a person with a naturalist as opposed to a supernaturalist world view. We brights don't believe in ghosts or elves or the Easter Bunny—or God. We disagree about many things, and hold a variety of views about morality, politics and the meaning of life, but we share a disbelief in black magic—and life after death.[4]

Thus, as commonly understood, naturalism is a position in philosophy that attempts to explain all phenomena and account for all values by means of strictly natural as opposed to supernatural means. Naturalism claims that there is no higher tribunal for truth than natural science itself. The scientific method is the best and only reliable method for judging truth claims about the universe. Philosophy, sociology, politics, religion or economics must all submit to the hard sciences such as biology, physics and chemistry. Any claim that is contrary to the findings from the scientists in these fields is false or superfluous. Thus, naturalism is a dogmatic theory, although many of its proponents deny such a description. Its proponents claim that the physical world is a closed system

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[3] D. M. Armstrong, "Naturalism, Materialism and First Philosophy," *Philosophia* 8 (1978) : 261; cited in S. Goetz, "Naturalism and Libertarian Agency,"in *Naturalism A Critical Analysis*, ed. W. L. Craig and J. P. Moreland (New York: Routledge, 2000), 156.
[4] D. Dennett, "The Bright Stuff," *New York Times*, July 12, 2003. For more information of Brights, see their webpage, available at http://the-brights.net.

requiring nothing beyond itself. There have been many writers who have advocated this strong type of naturalism, such as Bertrand Russell, W.V.O. Quine and Paul Churchland. Others, such as Donald Davidson, Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam and P.F. Strawson advocated a weaker version of naturalism that accepted thoughts as concepts, though not necessarily physical ones. Nonetheless, this weaker naturalism still sees all events of the world, concepts or otherwise, as ontologically dependent on physical ones.[5]

The common thread that I find embraced by all of these definitions (including eliminative, reductive, or non-reductive forms of naturalism) is the following, as I stated in the introduction: *Naturalism is the system of belief or research paradigm that excludes any teleological, theological or supernatural explanations for the elucidation of phenomena in the universe.* It assumes that the best explanations are causal, non-purposive explanations, ultimately depending on the causal regularities of the physical sciences. Moreover, if anything cannot be explained by the machinery of the hard sciences, such as consciousness, morality, or beauty, then it either is a mystery waiting to be resolved by the hard sciences, or it is epiphenomenal , or it does not exist except as a social or linguistic convention.

2. Naturalism as Science

Is naturalism unscientific?   In this section, I will argue that it is both unscientific and paradoxical.

Let us begin by asking "What is science?" According to the *American Heritage Science Dictionary:*

[Science is t]he investigation of natural phenomena through observation, theoretical explanation, and experimentation, or the knowledge produced by such investigation. Science makes use of the scientific method, which includes the careful observation of natural phenomena, the formulation of a

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[5] See K. Nielsen, *Naturalism without Foundations* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1996), 26; see also "The Center for Naturalism" (CFN) at
http://www.naturalism.org/center_for_naturalism.htm; last accessed 28 August 2004. "The CFN is a non-profit educational organization devoted to increasing public awareness of naturalism and its implications for social and personal well-being. By means of local activities, publications, research, conferences, educational programs, and policy development, the CFN seeks to foster the understanding that human beings and their behavior are fully caused, entirely natural phenomena, and that human flourishing is best achieved in the light of such understanding."

hypothesis, the conducting of one or more experiments to test the hypothesis, and the drawing of a conclusion that confirms or modifies the hypothesis.[6]

This definition presupposes methodological naturalism. What if a miracle occurred, such as a man rising from the dead, a person completely healed from an amputated leg, or a car driving without an engine after a prayer? How would a methodological naturalist view such an event? According to the center for teaching evolution at Berkley, science is non-dogmatic. Science Asks Three Basic Questions:

1.   What's there?
2.   How does it work?
3.   How did it come to be this way?[7]

The advocates at the center assert that "nothing in the scientific enterprise or literature requires belief. To ask someone to accept ideas purely on faith, even when these ideas are expressed by "experts," is unscientific. While science must make some assumptions, such as the idea that we can trust our senses, explanations and conclusions are accepted only to the degree that they are well founded and continue to stand up to scrutiny." This claim constitutes a naive definition because, after all, it is also a belief. Alvin Plantinga writes that "what is and isn't science could be settled just by appealing to a *definition*. One thinks this would work only if the original query were really a verbal question -- a question like: *Is the English word 'science' properly applicable to a hypothesis that makes reference to God?* But that wasn't the question. The question is instead: *Could a hypothesis that makes reference to God be part of science?* That question can't be answered just by citing a definition."[8]

Dismissing a theory such a Intelligent Design, for example, merely by saying that it violates the definition of science is not a rational argument at all. It would be wise not to limit our epistemic base of knowledge to only what we can test physically.   Science is supposed to be a developing an open arena for

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[6] Article "Science." *The American Heritage® Science Dictionary*. Retrieved June 21, 2008, from Dictionary.com website available at
http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/science.
[7] "Understanding Evolution for Teachers." University of California Museum of Paleontology, Berkeley, Calif. http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evosite/evohome.html; last accessed 21 June, 2008.
[8] Alvin Plantinga, "Methodological Naturalism Part 2" in "Philosophical Analysis Origins & Design" 18:2 available at
http://www.arn.org/docs/odesign/od182/methnat182.htm last accessed 15 November, 2009.

understanding and research.   To legislate against ideas such as the Intelligent Design movement contravenes the very principles of science.

Why can't science allow for the research of evidence for God or the soul? In principle, there should be no problem with this at all, according to what science is supposed to do. However, I argue that science has been hijacked by naturalistic people who hide behind their anti-religious or anti-supernatural inclinations and call it "science."

Many scientists not only hold to naturalism, but appear to manifest unconcealed opposition to those who do not share their view. For example, Richard Lewontin clarifies that current science requires a prior commitment to both methodological and philosophical naturalism, which cannot allow other worldviews to invade its academic turf:

> It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.[9]

This dogmatic method is not intrinsic to the nature of the scientific enterprise. It is not science by any means; it is dogmatism. As another example, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* states:

> There has been a virtual consensus, one that has held for years, that the world is essentially physical, at least in the following sense: if all matter were to be removed from the world, nothing would remain . . .[10]

William Provine, Professor of Biological Sciences at Cornell University avers:

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[9] R. Lewontin, "Billions and Billions of Demons," Review of Carl Sagan's The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark. New York Review of Books, Vol. 44, No. 1, January 9, 1997.

[10] J. Kim, "mind–body problem, the" The Oxford Companion to Philosophy. Ed. Ted Honderich. Oxford University Press, 1995. Oxford Reference Online (Oxford University Press).
http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t116.e1469
; last accessed 21 August 2004.

> [M]odern evolutionary biology . . . tells us . . . that nature has no detectable purposive forces of any kind . . . There are no gods and no designing forces that are rationally detectable. . . . we must conclude that when we die, we die and that is the end of us. . . . There is no hope of life everlasting. . . . [F]ree will, as traditionally conceived, the freedom to make uncoerced and unpredictable choices among alternative possible courses of action, simply does not exist. . . . [T]he evolutionary process cannot produce a being that is truly free to make choices. . . .The universe cares nothing for us. . . . Humans are nothing even in the evolutionary process on earth. . . . There is no ultimate meaning for humans.[11]

It is my hope that you are following me and perceiving the antagonism against any teleological or theological advances in the scientific sphere. It is thus no wonder that the academy automatically rules out of court any scientific movements that try to establish the existence of God or provide any verification for the supernatural, even before their evidence is presented.

With this said, I will present four arguments demonstrating that, dogmatic self-assertions notwithstanding, naturalism presented as a scientific movement actually does not constitute true science.

First, naturalism cannot account for nonphysical things like consciousness. Consciousness is as real as anything else we experience. As William Hasker put it, naturalism is the view that "in any instance of mechanistic causation, the proximate cause of the effect does not involve a goal, objective, or *telos*; rather, it consists of some disposition of masses, forces and the like . . . it appeals to antecedent conditions involving only nonpurposive, nonintentional entities."[12] But humans do have goals and objectives, and are very purposive and intentional entities. We have conscious experiences that are very authentic; in fact they are more real than inferred things like the solidity of the moon or historical questions of who was the first president of the USA. For example, you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are experiencing the sentences you are hearing right now. That is what cognitive scientists call *qualia* and "first-person experience." Philosopher Thomas Nagel called it, "The View From Nowhere" because it is nowhere to be found in our physical brains, and, although

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[11] W. Provine, "Progress in Evolution and Meaning in Life," in *Evolutionary Progress*, ed. M. H. Nitecki, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 49-74; cited in D. R. Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 32.
[12] W. Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 63.

it is subjective, it is very undeniably genuine. Qualia would not register on any physical system in the known world (although the results of you hearing this paper, such as your neurons firing, would).   It would follow that such mental events are caused by teleological agents called persons, not just ganglions, fibres and other material substances. Thus we have an inconsistency for the naturalist because human beings, according to naturalism, are physical entities and nothing more.

Second, on a naturalistic worldview, the explanation of the concept of objective logic or truth would be impossible. These notions would have to be basic abstracts and artificial conventions. What if someone believed that this year was 1872? Would that be false?[13] According to naturalism, it cannot be true or false.   There is no truth save that which we can measure with the hard sciences. How can the modus ponens be true? If Socrates is a philosopher, and all philosophers are mortal, then it follows that Socrates is mortal. How can this simple logical analysis be true, and continue to be true if there are no set logical laws in the universe? This is problematic.   This idea, that only what can be measured with the hard sciences is true, is false, because it is an idea that you can't measure with the hard sciences, and is, thus, self-defeating. So, to say that naturalism is true, is anti-naturalistic! That is a paradox for naturalism. The very structure of the scientific enterprise today is a naturalistic one; consequently, it is no wonder that the soul, miracles and God are automatically dismissed as nonexistent or as the conjecture of religious people.

Third, objective ethics would be automatically eliminated. If naturalism is correct with its denial of non-physical reality, there can be no moral truths. Consequently, ethical relativism becomes the moral system. Rape would only be wrong if the society subjectively declared it to be wrong. If one were to deny objective ethical standards, the Nazis' experiments would be good since that subculture saw their actions as acceptable.   These instances go against our intuitions and against the natural laws that have guided civilizations. Even many of us did not follow these rules, the rules still obtained. Thus to deny objective ethics is unscientific, or, conversely, naturalism provides the freedom to engage in atrocities in the name of science.

Forth, naturalistic scientists and philosophers do not allow naturalism to be challenged, thereby automatically making them, if not their theory, unscientific. Karl Popper, a famous philosopher of science, wrote, "the criterion

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[13] Norman Geisler and Paul Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 182.

of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability, or testability."[14] This is not to say that a theory must be shown to be false, but it must be possible to identify what would be the case if it were false. If we cannot or *are not allowed* to find the falsifiability, or refutability, or testability of naturalism, then, according to Popper, it is a not an authentic scientific theory. It is still not necessarily a false theory; but it is definitely not a scientific theory. (Although, to keep the record clear, I also believe it to be a false theory.)

Where does that leave the naturalists? I think Troy Cross of Yale University said it well in his review of Michael Rae's book, *World Without Design: The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism*: "If naturalism is to follow science wherever it leads … it cannot rule out specific kinds of entities [such as a soul] before science is complete. More generally, the problem is whether the science providing ontological guidance is *current* science or *ideal* science. If it is *current* science, then naturalism is probably false. If it is *ideal* science, then naturalism is metaphysically vacuous."[15] Cross says that "[e]pistemological naturalism fares no better. If it is at the mercy of future developments in science, it cannot follow science wherever it leads. But if it is immune to empirical results, then it is self-refuting, because it is just the sort of hypothesis that epistemic naturalism insists must be grounded on scientific investigation rather than armchair theorizing."[16] Now, I argue along the same lines that naturalism is a system that is postulating a theory and imposing it on the evidence. Thus, naturalism, by its own rules, is not science.

3. Naturalism Self-Defeated

According to the Alvin Plantinga's "Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism,"[17] the conjunction of the two theories of Darwinian evolution and

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[14] K. R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1962), 37.

[15] See T. Crane and D. H. Mellor, "There Is No Question of Physicalism," *Mind* 99 (1990); cited in Tony Cross, review of Michael Rae, *World Without Design: The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 2003.07.14.

[16] Cross, review of Michael Rae, *World Without Design*.

[17] For more information on this argument see A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) chap. 12, A. Plantinga, "Naturalism Defeated," Unpublished manuscript, 1994, A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 229-240, and *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism*, J. Beilby, ed. (London: Cornell University Press, 2002).

naturalism (hereafter: **E & A**) on the one hand, and the belief that our cognitive faculties are reliable contributors of true beliefs on the other hand, are incompatible. On a Darwinian account of evolution there is no reason why the adaptive benefits of awareness and cognition should give rise to true beliefs rather than just survival beliefs. In the Darwinian account, the causal closure of the physical world is an assumed truth.

According to current evolutionary theory, we human beings, like other forms of life, have developed from aboriginal unicellular life by way of such mechanisms as natural selection and genetic drift working on sources of genetic variation, the most popularly accept factor being random genetic mutation. Natural selection discards most of these mutations (they prove deleterious to the organism in which they appear), but some turn out to have survival value and to enhance fitness; they spread through the population and persist. According to this story, it is by way of these mechanisms, or mechanisms very much like them, that all the vast variety of contemporary organic life has developed; and it is by way of these same mechanisms that our cognitive faculties have arisen.

The argument here is that our cognitive faculties, if they have arisen from **E & R**, are not a reliable mechanism, nor can they be trusted to be accurate about what they report in the sense of the information being true even if it is beneficial to survival. The fact that a belief aids in our survival does not mean that it is true belief, only a helpful one for the moment. Now, according to traditional Christian (and Jewish and Muslim) thought, we human beings have been created in the image of God. This means, among other things, that he created us with the capacity for achieving [true] *knowledge.*"[18]

Plantinga's argument begins from certain doubts about the reliability of our cognitive faculties. A cognitive faculty—memory, perception, reason—is reliable if the majority of its deliverances are true. The reason we should doubt our cognitive faculties if we believe **E & R** is because natural selection doesn't care what you believe; it is interested only in how you behave. It selects for certain kinds of behavior, (i.e. those that enhance fitness) which is a measure of the chances that one's genes are widely represented in subsequent generations. It does not select for belief per se, except insofar as the latter is appropriately related to behaviour. Therefore, Plantinga says, it is not truth that our cognitive processes pursue, according to E & R **,** but survival.

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[18] Alvin Plantinga, "Naturalism Defeated," manuscript.

Furthermore, just because some entity operates according to a survival instinct does not necessarily mean that all the information it conveys is true (in the sense that it the information corresponds to reality). Thus, since on a naturalistic account the probability that our cognitive mechanisms are reliable would be either low or inscrutable, we ought not to trust our reasoning abilities to give us accurate reports of truth claims regarding the world and/or our ideas. Thus, to say that naturalism is true, and to arrive at this truth from reason and to hold on to **E & R** at the same time, is inconsistent. Thus, the claim that "naturalism is true" is self-defeating. It cannot be true any more than any statements made by the naturalist can be true. Certain "truth-claims" can only, using evolutionary lingo, be "adaptively successful," but not necessarily true.

James Beilby wrote that, although the naturalist cannot produce an argument against Plantinga's argument, the naturalist has no reason that necessitates that he doubts his cognitive faculties in the first place.[19] This pragmatic objection, in my understanding, entails the assumption that it does not matter if our experiences or thoughts of the world are true, the only thing that matters is if they are useful for adaptive behaviour for natural selection and survival.

I asked Plantinga about this pragmatic objection levelled against his theory. Plantinga responded that his evolutionary argument against naturalism is not an argument against the naturalist who thinks that naturalism is pragmatic, but it is only against the naturalist who claims that naturalism is in fact true.[20] I take this reply to add an extra step. If the pragmatic naturalist tries to hold that his naturalism escapes Plantinga's argument, the naturalist would have to believe his own argument is not true, which is absurd. However if he believes it to be merely pragmatic, then he must also logically believe that the belief "it is pragmatic" is also true. Thus, this attempted route of escape leads him right back into the jaws of the same argument again.

Thus, we cannot rely on our cognitive facilities for truth claims about the world if naturalism and evolution are true, but equally we cannot rely on any cognitive facilities which suggest that naturalism is false if E & R is true. To suggest that naturalism is false is to make the truth claim "naturalism is false." This preceding sentence is either true or false, and the "evolutionary argument

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[19] J. Beilby, "Alvin Plantinga's Pox on Metaphysical Naturalism," *Philosophia Christi* Vol. 5, No.1 (2003) : 131-142.

[20] Personal meeting with Plantinga in his office at the University of Notre Dame, May 4th 2004.

against naturalism" shows that we cannot trust our facilities at all if **E & R** is true about anything.

Approximately forty years before Plantinga's argument was published, Richard Taylor, (now deceased) Professor of Philosophy at Union College, gave an interesting thought experiment regarding something similar to the EAAN. Taylor asked us to imagine that the sign welcoming visitors to Wales, "THE BRITISH RAILWAYS WELCOMES YOU TO WALES," is an accidental coincidence of nature. If it is an accidental coincidence, then we have no reason, argues Taylor, to trust its veracity. The stones have no purpose such that we think they do, that is, to welcome visitors to Wales. Taylor argues that if you were to believe that the stones did give you a reason, a true reason to believe you were entering Wales, then you must also believe that they were arranged by an intelligent entity with a *telos* or purpose in mind, namely to welcome visitors to Wales. However,

> it would be irrational for you to regard the arrangement of the stones as evidence that you were entering Wales, and at the same time to suppose that they might have come to have that arrangement accidentally, that is, as the result of the ordinary interactions of natural or physical forces. If, for instance, they came to be so arranged over the course of time, simply by rolling down the hill, one by one, and finally just happening to end up that way, or if they were strewn upon the ground that way by the forces of an earthquake or storm or whatnot, then their arrangement would in no sense constitute evidence that you were entering Wales, or for anything whatever unconnected with themselves.[21]

I would add that it is irrational to believe that any sign that is accidentally formed, that is, has a non-purposeful origin, be it in an ancient pyramid or in a downtown subway in London or New York, would also have a true (corresponding to reality) referent. For example, imagine that I found some writing in an ancient pyramid. With the help of the expertise of some archaeologist and linguists, I deciphered the writing to indicate the following: "Below the black sarcophagus, which is buried 50 meters under the gold one, you will find a tunnel leading to the pharaoh's most treasured possession." If, after digging, I found a black sarcophagus with a tunnel underneath leading toward a greater treasure, I would be *irrational* to suppose that the message had been

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[21] See R. Taylor, *Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 96-102.

accidentally formed. But, for this belief of mine to be rational, I must believe that the message was designed by an intelligent agent. That is Taylor's thesis.[22]

Taylor says that some people may object, namely naturalists, holding that we can, in fact, trust our minds because we found our cognitive faculties reliable in the past, and thus have a sound reason for trusting them now. Taylor says this thinking is "absurd, if not question-begging." [23]

Taylor argues that truths that have survival values are not the same as truths that are reasonable or have a purpose. He argues that his argument is not based on religious but metaphysical and philosophical considerations. One cannot imply that a personal God exists from these considerations, he argues.[24] I think that it does not prove a personal God *directly*, but it at least it shows that once again that the EAAN is sound and that naturalism, as is it being presented, is false or question begging.

It is important to point out that the EAAN does not claim that, if our cognitive faculties have arisen from determined forces, they cannot give us adequate rational accounts of the world. That argument is the claim that determinism is self-defeating because if it is true, then the person who arrived at that truth, is himself determined and cannot trust his own rational faculties to

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[22] He then applies this observation to the human cognitive facilities:
"We saw that it would be irrational for anyone to say both that the marks he found on a stone had a natural, nonpurposeful origin and also that they reveal some truth with respect to something other than themselves, something that is not merely inferred from them. One cannot rationally believe both of these things. So also, it is now suggested, it would be irrational for one to say both that his sensory and cognitive faculties had a natural, nonpurposeful origin and also that they reveal some truth with respect to something other than themselves, something that is not merely inferred from them. If their origin can be entirely accounted for in terms of chance variations, natural selection, and so on, without supposing that they somehow embody and express the purposes of some creative being, then the most we can say of them is that they exist, that they are complex and wondrous in their construction, and are perhaps in other respects interesting and remarkable. We cannot say that they are, entirely by themselves, reliable guides to any truth whatever, save only what can be inferred from their own structure and arrangement. If, on the other hand, we do assume that they are guides to some truths having nothing to do with themselves, then it is difficult to see how we can, consistently with that supposition, believe them to have arisen by accident, or by the ordinary workings of purposeless forces, even over ages of time.
[23] Ibid., 102.
[24] Ibid., 100-101.

arrive at a true argument.[25]   However, and I agree with Richard Swinburne, that this argument has "no force at all."[26]   If a person or a computer's intelligence is determined, this fact does not mean that they cannot logically calculate a formula, and that their conclusion must be false, unreliable or illogical.   In the same way, a man may hear good arguments and wilfully accept them while being determined to do so, and yet be justified in believing what he arrived at. Swinburne writes of a conversation he had with Rodger Penrose, author of the *Emperor's New Mind*[27] and *Shadows of the Mind*,[28] that the brain "contains an essentially non-algorithmic element. This would imply that the future would not be computable from the present, even though it might be determined by it."[29]

This argument involving determinism is not the argument presented by Plantinga and Taylor.   They are *not* arguing that if our cognitive facilities are determined that they cannot deliver truth rather they argue that if our cognitive facilities are determined by blind forces then we cannot be rational to believe that they can give us a trustworthy account of reality.   If we wish to trust them, then we must also believe that there was an intelligent agent who created them. **N&E** vigorously deny this inference.   If **N&E** are true, then our cognitive facilities should only give us adaptive information about the world that may or may not be

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[25] This was C. S. Lewis's argument against Elizabeth Anscombe in his book *Miracles*, which he subsequently took back and revised in a 2nd edition. It is available from many different publishers.

[26] R. Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, Revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 233.

[27] (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

[28] (London: Vintage, Random House, 1995).

[29] *Emperor's New Mind*, 431, quoted in Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 353; Karl Popper writes, referring to J.B.S. Haldane, ". . . if materialism is true, it seems to me that we cannot know that it is true. If my opinions are the result of the chemical processes going on in my brain, they are determined by the laws of chemistry, not logic."(J. B. S. Haldane, *The Inequality of Man* [London: Chatto & Windus, 1932], 157, cited in K. Popper and J. C. Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain*, [London: Routledge, 1977], 75). Halden subsequently repented of this assertion. Popper says this is an argument against determinism not [naturalism], however Popper revives the argument on pages 75-81 of his book with Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain*.)   Popper gives the example of the computer. It was designed by intelligent people, and thus the argument does not work for it. If a lion arrived at a logically good choice it would be by accident not by intelligent deliberation. Also, he points out that the laws of logic that hold the naturalist's argument together are not physically located laws, yet real nonetheless. If naturalism is true it cannot be true based on logical laws because concrete, that is real, logical laws, which make things rational, cannot exist in a materialist world, but only in our minds as artificial conventions.

true, and the veracity of any other information is low or inscrutable, and thus unreliable.[30]

What about the evolutionary rationalization of consciousness? The evolutionary naturalists may hold that our patterns of beliefs/desires/actions are rational ones. They are causal features that can be explained by the evolutionary benefits of rationality. Again, the argument is not that our desires are rational, in the sense of them being practical, but that the probability that our cognitive mechanisms are reliable indicators of true claims (aside from practical and survival value) is either low or inscrutable, and thus they cannot be trusted to be *true* accounts of the world. The EAAN does not refute the naturalist who holds that beliefs/desires/actions are practical for living, but the naturalist who insists that naturalism and evolution are in fact true.

Yet most naturalist philosophers do posit mental states and hold to **N&E**. Thus, they destabilize their own position in two ways 1) if **N&E** are true then they cannot trust their cognitive facilities to give them true accounts of the world (aside from practical and survival value) and 2) if **N&E** are true then mental events are irrelevant to concrete intentional and phenomenal events in which we human beings participate daily. Both of these conclusions are anti-intuitive, but must be true if **N&E** are true.

I close with what Howard Robinson perceptively wrote in 1982:

[T]he materialist makes a show of being tough-minded. He is in fact a dogmatist, obedient not to the authority of reason, but to a certain picture of the world. That picture is hypnotising but terrifying: the world as a machine of which we are all insignificant parts. Many people share Nagel's fear of this world view, but, like Nagel, are cowed into believing that it must be true (T, Nagel ""Physicalism," *Philosophical Review*, 74 [1965] : 340) But reason joins with every other constructive human instinct in telling us that it is false and that only a parochial and servile attitude towards physical science can mislead anyone into believing it. To opt for materialism is to choose to

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[30] Even Roger Penrose, a professor of mathematics at the University of Oxford is sympathetic to this idea. Daniel Dennett wrote of Penrose, "If our brains were equipped with algorithms, Penrose argues, natural selection would have to have designed those algorithms, but, [Penrose wrote] "The 'robust' specifications are the ideas that underlie the algorithms. But ideas are things that, as far as we know, need conscious minds for their manifestation"" (R. Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind*, 415, cited in D. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* [New York,: NY: TouchStone, 1995], 447).

believe something obnoxious, against the guidance of reason. This is not tough-minded, but a wilful preference for a certain form of soulless, false and destructive modernism.[31]

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[31] H. Robinson, *Matter and Science: A Critique of Contemporary Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 125.

A Presuppositional Response to the Problem of Evil

K. Dayton Hartman[1]

At its core, the presuppositional response provided in this paper is incomplete. A robust presuppositional apologetic does not simply reveal the self-defeating nature of utilizing the problem of evil as an objection to theism; rather, presuppositionalists should propose a demonstration of this inconsistency that requires not just worldview arguments, but ultimately an appeal to enscripturated revelation.[2] The purpose of this article is simply to familiarize the reader with the fundamental points of entry by which the irrationality of claiming the non-existence of the Christian God based upon the existence of evil may be demonstrated.

The deliberate selection of this methodology in responding to the problem of evil in no way negates the legitimacy of other apologetic methodologies. Certainly, presuppositionalists utilize elements of both classical and evidential apologetics. The presuppositional apologetic fits into the classical method insofar as presuppositionalists demonstrate the necessity of God's existence, based upon universal worldview presuppositions, before pressing the unbeliever to recognize the God of the Scriptures. Likewise, it contains evidential elements in that, after the unbeliever has recognized the failure of his or her atheistic worldview, evidences for the veracity of Scripture or the resurrection of Christ should routinely become the next step. In fact, presuppositional arguments for the existence of God are most effective when associated with the more traditional

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[1] This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Interntional Society of Christian apologetics at the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, April 29-20, 2011, in Wake Forest, NC. Contact: kdhartman08@gmail.com.

[2] Greg Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis* (American Vision, 2007), 101. Greg Bahnsen has argued that a complete presuppositional approach must utilize the text of Scripture in completing the apologetics presentation.

arguments for God's existence. Therefore, rather than understanding presuppositional methodology as exclusive and incompatible with other apologetic approaches, there should be a coming-together of arguments in a mutually strengthening relationship.[3]   Still, despite this potential congruence, there is no gainsaying that notable theological differences remain in the assumptions that underlie each methodology.[4]

1.   A Brief Description of Presuppositional Apologetics

For some traditional presuppositional apologists, including Cornelius Van Til, all methods that could not accurately be described as presuppositional are invalid and unbiblical. That is not the position taken by the author of this paper. Instead, the presuppositional description provided will be most appropriately referred to as a modified-presuppositional method.

In proposing a modified-presuppositional approach, it is critical to define what is meant by presupposition. Essentially, a presupposition is a central belief that acts as a lens by which an individual views or judges other beliefs. Beyond these central beliefs are what John Frame describes as ultimate presuppositions. These presuppositions are worldview forming and informing beliefs that take precedence over all others.[5]

For most presuppositional apologists, what typifies the presuppositional methodology is its transcendental approach to the question of God's existence. John Frame summarizes the approach as follows: "...Our 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."[6] For presuppositionalists, this is the preeminent method of deconstructing the atheist worldview. This method does not deem classic apologetics arguments, such as the cosmological argument, to be invalid, but rather more fully "fleshed out" when coupled with transcendental argumentation.[7]

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[3] See John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 71-73.

[4] Presuppositional apologists are generally (but not always) Reformed in theology.

[5] John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1987), 45.

[6] Steven B. Cowan & Stanley N. Gundry; ed. *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000) John Frame page 220.

[7] Ibid., 220-221.

The ultimate goal of such arguments is to reinforce the absolute dependence of the unbeliever upon the God of the Bible in every form of thought and argumentation, even though he or she may be unaware of this fact or unwilling to admit it. Greg Bahnsen writes, "The Christian claim...is justified because the knowledge of God is the context and prerequisite for knowing anything else whatsoever."[8] Pressing this fact removes the unbelievers' confidence in their own autonomy and confronts them with their suppression of the truth of God.[9] Bahnsen continues, "Without presupposing God, it is impossible to make theoretical sense out of any rational method for 'justifying' beliefs of any kind on any subject."[10]   The aim of presuppositional apologetics is to force the self-defeating nature of the materialist worldview to the forefront of the apologetic endeavor. Douglas Wilson describes the process by which this argument is carried out by saying,

> The basic argument in dealing with atheists is this: You ask the atheist what he is presupposing about the universe in order to reject God. Well, the fact that he is arguing for atheism presupposes that the universe is a rational place, that arguments matter, and that there is a coherence between the noises coming out of his mouth, and the way the external world actually is. But, given atheism, is that kind of universe actually out there? The answer is no. The atheist has to presuppose a God-given kind of universe in order to deny God.[11]

It is this emphasis upon inconsistency in presuppositions that gives the presuppositional apologetic its unique, but not mutually exclusive, approach.[12] In short, presuppositional apologetics reveal that the atheist, as Cornelius Van Til

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[8] Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 262.

[9] Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis*, 102.

[10] Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 262.

[11] Statement taken from an interview I conducted with Douglas Wilson on my website. http://jude3project.org/2010/12/26/ten-questions-with-doug-wilson/.

[12] From the previously mentioned interview with Douglas Wilson: "There are two basic ways to approach this. You can either try to come alongside the unbeliever and reason to the Bible, or you can approach the unbeliever and reason from the Bible. The former is an evidential approach, and the latter is the presuppositional approach. The two approaches are commonly assumed to be mutually exclusive, but I don't think that is necessary at all."

describes the situation, must sit in the lap of God in order to slap Him in the face.[13]

2.   The Foundation of a Presuppositional Response

Presuppositionalists root the basis for this methodology in Paul's letter to the Romans. In chapter one, Paul writes:

> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools...[14]

It is the presuppositional conviction that all human beings intuitively recognize that they live and exist in a theistic universe. Still, unbelievers repress and suppress this knowledge on a daily basis.[15] John Frame comments, "We direct our apologetic witness not to his [the unbeliever] empiricist epistemology or whatever, but to his memory of God's revelation and to the epistemology implicit in that revelation."[16] While those apart from God do their best to suppress the knowledge of God, this very knowledge undergirds the manner in which they process data and understand reality. This is the point of contact[17] spoken of by presuppositionalists and this is where apologetic efforts should begin.

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[13] Banhsen *Pushing the Antithesis*, 103.

[14] Romans 1:18-22 ESV

[15] Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis*, 38.

[16] John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 11.

[17] Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing; 2nd Edition, 2003), 115. Cornelius Van Til describes the point of contact, from a Reformed perspective as follows: "...Man's mind is derivative. As Such it is naturally in contact with God's revelation. It is surrounded by nothing but revelation. It is itself inherently revelational. It cannot naturally be conscious of itself without being conscious of its creatureliness. For man, self-consciousness presupposes God-consciousness." Cf. 83-121 for a full discussion.

3. **Pushing the Antithesis**[18]

Addressing presuppositions presses the antithesis[19] that is inherent between Christian and non-Christian worldviews. This is vitally important, as Francis Schaeffer writes, "We must not forget that historic Christianity stands on a basis of antithesis. Without it, historic Christianity is meaningless."[20] Thus, according to Francis Schaeffer, an effective and biblical apologetic must push the antithesis.[21]

It is through the pressing of this antithesis that the atheist is confronted with the fact that apart from a Christian worldview, life is meaningless and ultimately of no value.[22] This approach is quite necessary because, as Schaeffer has observed, "It is impossible for any non-Christian individual or group to be consistent to their system in logic or in practice."[23] This inconsistency or antithesis speaks directly to the problem of evil.

4. Introduction to the Problem of Evil

In responding to the various objections leveled against Christian theism by popular promoters of atheism, the problem of evil is one of the more difficult

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[18] It should be noted that Francis Schaeffer did not discount the value of other methods of apologetics. However, he did propose that the cultural shift away from absolutes would have been stopped or at least slowed had apologists focused more upon integrating presuppositional arguments into their apologetic approach. See Francis Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer Volume 1:The God Who is There* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 7. The level to which Schaeffer could be called even a modified presuppositionalist has been debated. See Bryan A. Follis, *Truth with Love: The Apologetics of Francis Schaeffer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 114.

[19] Greg Bahnsen states, 'Antithesis speaks of opposition or a counter point. As Christians we must recognize the fundamental disagreement between biblical thought and all forms of unbelief at the foundational level of our theory of knowing and knowledge. Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis*, 13.

[20] Francis Schaeffer , *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer Volume 1:The God Who is There*, 8.

[21] For Shaeffer, this antithesis is found even in the doctrine of justification. He stated, "Christianity demands antithesis, not as a some abstract concept of truth, but in the fact that God exists and in personal justification. The biblical concept of justification is a total personal, personal antithesis. Before justification, we were dead in the kingdom of darkness." *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer Volume 1:The God Who is There*, 47.

[22] Ibid., 44.

[23] Ibid., 133.

objections to overcome. The difficulty in responding to this objection is not due to its strength as an argument against Christianity; rather, its strength lies in the emotional response it conjures.[24] Sadly, the emotion-evoking rhetoric of the New Atheists[25] tends to blur the lines between that which makes sense logically and that which speaks to the heart emotionally.

Addressing the problem of evil is made all the more difficult, not just because of the evocative nature of the problem, but because those defending Christian theism may also fall prey to the intended use of this objection, which is an intentional detachment from logic and submersion into emotion. Therefore, rather than debate specific elements of evil that plague the world from the outset of the exchange with an atheist, perhaps another course could be more fruitful and far less entangling. This new course would demand that those objectors to theism raising the problem of evil do so in a manner consistent with their own worldview. Demanding big-picture consistency prior to the engagement with the particulars will redirect the objection to the question that is truly at the heart of the issue. That question is simply, "Evil clearly exists, so, which worldview provides the best explanation and solution for the problem of evil? " Requiring atheists to remain consistent with their own worldview in answering this crucial question will prove most effective in accomplishing the apologetic task.

5.   The Problem of Evil Stated

While it would certainly be intellectually engaging to recount every instance of evil cited by the New Atheists as an example of Christian theism's failure, it would accomplish little in getting to the heart of the matter. Therefore, we will limit our focus to classic formulations of the problem of evil. Perhaps the most basic of all of the classic statements regarding the problem of evil is as follows:

> 1. If God were all-powerful, He would be able to prevent or to destroy all evil.
>
> 2. If God were all-good, He would desire to prevent or to destroy all evil.

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[24] A prime example of how the atheist attempts to appeal to emotion rather than reason came was demonstrated in a recent debate between William Lane Craig and Sam Harris at Notre Dame.

[25] Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennet (sometimes referred to as "the four horsemen") are generally considered the chief thinkers of the New Atheism.

3. Evil exists.

4. Therefore, an all-powerful, all-good God does not exist.[26]

William Rowe formulates the problem this way:

1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some great good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

Given the conditions he observes in the world, Rowe concludes,

3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.[27]

The traditional formulation of the problem assumes a few critical facts: First, that which can be objectively identified as evil actually exists. Certainly, the use of the term *objectively* could be debated. Still, this concept is being assumed in order to furnish a viable premise upon which to deny the existence of God. Second, God would want to, and actually would destroy all evil [insofar as doing so would not produce an evil of similar or greater magnitude]. Third, the reality which we experience is therefore logically incoherent with Christian theism. The first and third assumptions directly demonstrate a worldview inconsistency.

6. **Responding to the Problem of Evil from Presuppositions**

   A. **The Logic of Evil**

Anytime the atheist objector states the problem of evil, he or she generally does so in a format that is both logically coherent and emotionally engaging. It is

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[26] Adapted from John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 150.

[27] Louis P. Pojman, ed. *Philosophy of Religion*. William Rowe, *The Inductive Argument from Evil Against the Existence of God* (Albany, NY: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998), 212.

interesting that atheism is purported to be a position that is logical and consistent with reality. Given the materialist worldview of atheism, its use of and insistence upon logic is highly problematic.[28] In an attempt to circumvent the problems surrounding their use of logic, atheists have presented a few options for explaining the origin and authority of logic, as follows.

B. Options for Logic

One manner in which atheists attempt to explain the reliability of logic is by claiming that logic comes from nature. That is to say that logic merely describes that which we observe in nature. The problem with this approach is that it already assumes the objectivity of logic. Occurrences in nature are classified by use of of the scientific method. However, in this context, that process leads to circular reasoning. The scientific method is a viable method by which to asses occurrences in nature chiefly because it assumes that logic already has objective validity. Classification of what is observed in nature can only be done by utilizing fundamental logical categories. It would be a both propagating a fiction and arguing in a circle to say that scientists derive logic from nature and then describe what they observed in nature by the logic thatthey have derived. No, they assume that the data they find in nature are either logical or not-yet-intelligible.

Another popular proposal for the objective existence of logic is its development as a means for survival. This proposal fails on a few accounts. First, it assumes that an impersonal process can produce that which is personal. Second, it assumes that adherence to logic assures survival. Experience proves that neither proposition true. It would seem as though species that do not possess capabilities for recognizing logic appear to have a greater ability for survival than beings that recognize logic.[29] Third, proposing that evolution explains the origin of logic is also circular because it would demand that evolutionary processes would exhibit the use of the laws of logic, which they clearly do not. Evolutionary processes do not manifest the necessity of logic for survival. Thus, explaining the objectivity of logic in the context of evolutionary survival raises more questions than it answers.

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[28] See the essay, "Philosophical Paradoxes of Darwinian Evolutionary Naturalism" by Khaldoun Sweis in this volume of the *Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics* for further explication of this point.

[29] John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 104.

Some atheists explain that the laws of logic are little more than generally agreed-upon principles. Yet, logic transcends the groups for which they are normatively considered as conventions (i.e. Western civilization). If logic is formed by an informal vote or consensus, then the pervasive nature of these laws in human experience is inexplicable.

C. The Transcendental Argument for God (TAG)

These inconsistencies can be further demonstrated by using the Transcendental Argument for God (henceforth referred to as TAG).[30] This argument is premised upon the recognizable constants used in logic. These constants or absolutes are generally referred to as the laws of logic. These laws are the law of identity[31], the law of non-contradiction[32] and the law of excluded middle.[33]

The laws of logic are constant and consistent throughout human experience. For example, the laws of logic demand that there is no such thing as a square-circle. Similarly, the laws of logic preclude the possibility that we may one day discover a marauding band of married-bachelors. The laws of logic must be true at all times. If these laws were not true, then the aforementioned impossibilities would become potentially actual occurrences. Any attempt to prove that these laws are not absolutely true would be self-defeating, for in demonstrating that these laws are not universally binding, one must use said laws in presenting one's

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[30] TAG could best be understood as a family of arguments rather than a single argument. There is no definitive manner in which to state the argument and it can be adapted to the audiences understanding of logic.

[31] Something is what it is and is not what it is not. For instance, a human is a human and not also a dog, insofar as being a dog would deny the identity as a human being. In other words, a specific human being is a human being, and he can also be a butcher and a baker, etc. But he cannot be a human being and not-a-human being.

[32] A statement cannot be both true and false at the same time in the same sense. In application, a thing or a state of affairs described by a statement cannot be both what it is and the contradictory of what it is at the same time or in the same sense.

[33] A given assertion is either true or false. For example, "You are attending the 2011 ISCA meeting." That statement is either true or false. Consequently, a disjunction of two contradictory statements must always be true. We must be careful, though, to guard against a common misunderstanding. The law of excluded middle does not provide us with omniscience, and frequently we do not know which one of the two options is true. If I say that you either are or are not an unruly penguin, it is pretty obvious that you are not. However, for the statement that you either do or do not carry a certain recessive gene, I do not know which option is correct, but one or the other must still be true.

case. Additionally, without the existence of the laws of logic, rational exchanges would be utterly impossible. The exchange of information would be, at best, subjective and at worst absurd. Therefore, objecting to the absolute nature of the laws of logic is a futile exercise.

Building upon this understanding of logic, TAG proposes that the laws of logic are transcendent. This characteristic means that regardless of time, location or the existence of humans, the laws remain true. To deny such a proposal would be to allow that at some point, that the nature of logic could change. In other words, there may be in our future a time when square-circles come into existence or in which married-bachelors become a recognized minority in the world's population.

The transcendence of logic can further be confirmed by the fact that the laws of logic are recognized by different persons from different contexts at different times. Human beings often differ on tastes in music, ice-cream and the best places to vacation. Yet, logic supersedes these subjective nuances of human opinion and thinking and is therefore different from and not dependent upon the thoughts of humans. Rather, it transcends human thinking but is recognized or discovered by humans.

Another aspect of logic is its immaterial and conceptual nature. Logic has no mass or material composition. Logic is not produced by any physical process within the universe and is not dependent upon any continuing process for its existence. While these logical absolutes are not composed of matter they are recognized and considered by human minds. However, these absolutes are not created by human minds. To be created by a human mind would render them subjective. Yet that which is conceptual is produced by a mind. Given the conceptual and absolute nature of logic, it must be the product of an infinite, non-human mind. Within the bounds of Christian theism, this mind is recognized to be the mind of God. This is not to say that God created logic. Rather, logic is that which emanates from the mind of God. God is logical, therefore all that He creates accords to the logical processes of His mind.

Therefore, by stating the problem of evil in a logical manner, the atheist is assuming specific properties within his universe that simply cannot exist. Given the presuppositions of atheism, it would be impossible to demonstrate that evil actually exists, and that this is a problem for theism. Still, the existence of evil is, in fact, an issue that must be addressed by theists because a logical argument for the non-existence of God can be made based upon the existence of evil. Still, this argument is only logical in a universe that is foreign to an atheistic worldview.

The statement that the existence of evil is a logical problem for Christian theism (where by "problem I mean that it is an issue requiring attention) is both a true potentially self-defeating statement. If Christian theism is false, the syllogism by which the problem of evil is stated is at best subjective reasoning and at worst meaningless because than there is no foundation for logic, which means that there can be no logic, and, consequently, no logical problem. Both the atheist and theist can agree that the problem of evil is neither subjective nor absurd. In agreeing to such a fact, only the theist is remaining true to his presuppositions and consistent with his understanding of the universe. In summary, by formulating the problem of evil, the atheist must assume that his universe does not, in fact, exist.

D. **The Moral Dilemma**

Atheists rightly observe the immense pain, suffering and injustice in the world and deem it evil or morally repugnant. So, when atheists proclaim the evil of rape, murder and thievery, theists can agree. But only from a theistic worldview can someone observe all that takes place in the world and deem it genuinely evil in any meaningful, objective sense. Any statement declaring some action or activity as "evil" assumes some standard by which good and evil can be judged.

This is problematic for the atheist who reduces morals to either personal preferences similar to enjoying one flavor of ice cream over another, or to cultural constructs reflecting the cumulative preferences of a given people group. In either case, a blatant fact remains: morals are entirely subjective. This fact produces a bleak situation aptly described by Winfried Corduan. He writes, "Without a God behind the world, suffering and evil can be no more than painful indicators of the futility of a meaningless life."[34]

The effect that the absence of an objective foundation for good and evil has upon morality is stunning. If all morality is ultimately subjective and rooted in subjective, finite structures (be it individually or collectively), then nothing can be deemed truly evil. This conclusion is especially troubling when considering human rights and the value of life. As Greg Koukl and Francis Beckwith point out, "The notions of human respect and dignity depend on the existence of moral

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[34] Winfried Corduan, *No Doubt About It* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 1997), 128.

truth."[35] If one removes the objectivity of truth and the binding nature of logic, then the only conclusion one can arrive at is that "...nothing has transcendent value, including human beings."[36]

When atheists object to the existence of God due to the existence of evil, apologists must respond by addressing their false assumptions. Certainly, evil exists; that idea is not up for debate. However, the recognition of evil from the atheistic perspective is in dispute. The reason for this tension arises from the fact that, in order to object to God's existence based upon the existence of evil, one must assume a degree of objectivity in proclaiming that those things that are undesirable are not just a nuisance but actually evil. The problems that this assumption presents for the atheistic worldview are manifold. The issue at hand is primarily this: Can anything be described as objectively, morally evil from the materialist perspective? The answer is no! Philosopher Chad Meister points out this dilemma when he writes, "One cannot consistently affirm both that there are no objective moral values, on the one hand, and that rape, torture and the like are objectively morally evil on the other."[37] Clearly, nothing can be called objectively good or evil unless trans-cultural, objective moral values, by which we assess moral particulars, actually exist. Given the "matter-only" claims of atheism, immaterial, binding laws that provide the framework for moral decisions and assessment simply cannot exist. The only genuine "out" for the atheist is to claim that, when a culture comes to a consensus regarding that which it calls evil, then that action or condition is actually evil. Taking this position raises a serious problem; namely its implication that the content of ethics is defined by the consensus of a society, which means effectively, by those who sway the greatest power in a society. Thus, "might makes right." The strength of the will of the masses dictates that which could be called good or evil. Therefore, the actions of a given people could never be objectively deemed as immoral within its own society. The Holocaust was then little more than the cultural outworking of the consensus of a people group and cannot be objectively identified as immoral by anyone outside of that culture at that time.

A further problem resides in the assumption that even within a particular culture a consensus may identify that which is good or evil apart from objective moral values. How does one assess what constitutes cultural consensus for the

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[35] Gregory Koukl & Francis Beckwith, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 21.

[36] Ibid., 22.

[37] William Lane Craig & Chad Meister, ed. *God is Good God is Great* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 109.

definition of good or evil? Is it a simple statistical majority or is it a two-thirds majority? What statistical requirement could be deemed as the moral or good rule to which all cultures should adhere?

Additionally, how does one define cultural consensus when even the very definition of a culture or people group could be questioned? For instance, it is recognized that within every nation exists sub-cultures. At what point should it be considered morally good to allow subcultures to dictate for themselves that which is good versus that which is evil? How could anyone objectively identify the activities of a sub-culture of necrophiliacs as genuinely evil in such a world? The answer is quite obvious: it would be impossible apart from moral tyranny (which would be logically permissible).

Furthermore, individuals do not live in the real-world in such a manner as to remain consistent with this subjective moral proposition. If morals were simply cultural constructs, when the atheist hears news of genocide or ritualistic mutilation of female reproductive organs, they would not respond with, "That is evil!" No! Instead, they would reply with, "Well, that is not my moral taste but to each his own." Yet, time and time again the leaders of modern atheism exclaim in horror at the atrocities carried out around the world. This is especially true when the atheist believes that they or their interests have been wronged. As C.S. Lewis has pointed out, even those who deny the objectivity or absolute nature of the Law of Nature (moral absolutes) assume these absolutes when they themselves or their interests are wronged. This sentiment goes beyond frustration with some outside force infringing upon their preference or happiness. What does occur is a negative reaction at the thought that those harming the atheist or their interests violated some standard the atheist assumes to be binding, and that should be obvious to the outside agent.[38]

In an ultimately self-defeating way, the cultural "out" for the atheist leads to absurdity. This fact leads Greg Bahnsen to the following assessment:

> On the one hand, he [the unbeliever] believes and speaks as though some activity (e.g.' child abuse) is wrong in itself, but on

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[38] C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York, NY: HaperOne, 2007), 15. Lewis goes on to argue that despite varying cultural interpretation of the Law of Nature, it is nevertheless, universal. So, while some may argue that a man can only have one wife and another argues he may have many wives, both assume that it would be absolutely wrong to take any woman a man pleases. This is especially true if that woman (via a marriage covenant) "belongs" to the man from whom she is taken.

the other hand he believes and speaks as though this activity is wrong only if the individual (or culture) chooses some value which is inconsistent with it (e.g.' pleasure, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, freedom). When the unbeliever professes that people determine ethical values for themselves, the unbeliever implicitly holds that those who commit evil are not really doing anything evil, given the values which they have chosen for themselves. In this way, the unbeliever who is indignant over wickedness supplies the very premises which philosophically condone and permit such behavior, even though at the same time the unbeliever wishes to insist that such behavior is not permitted--it is "evil."[39]

It is one thing to assert that an action, situation or condition is evil. It is an entirely different issue to justify one's belief that an action, situation or condition is evil. Only by assuming the very same conditions they are denying (objective, transcendent moral values) can an atheist make any definitive moral judgment.

Conclusion

Apologists must demand that atheists remain consistent to their worldview when approaching the problem of evil. Why? Because no atheists actually consistently live within the bounds of their worldview presuppositions. Very few atheists actually take their presuppositions (that logic is not absolute and morals are subjective) to their logical conclusion. However, as John Frame observes, "The unbeliever may resist this extreme [the logical conclusion of his presuppositions], for he knows it is implausible, but there is nothing in his adopted philosophy to guard against it."[40] Similarly, Ravi Zacharias has noted, "An Atheist may be morally minded, but he just happens to be living better than his belief about what the nature of man warrants."[41]

When it comes to the problem of evil, atheists must ultimately borrow from a theistic worldview in order to deny theism. First, the atheist must assume the existence and authority of logic. While the atheist worldview does not allow for immaterial, transcendent laws, the atheist must assume as much in order to argue

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[39] Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2009), 170.

[40] Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 194.

[41] Ravi Zacharias, *The Real Face of Atheism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 64.

against the existence of God. Second, the atheist must propose that the world is filled with that which could be objectively called evil or things that ought not be. The atheistic worldview does not allow such an assessment. So, in order to raise the issue of evil as an objection to the existence of God, the atheist must once again borrow from a theistic worldview. Inconsistency is the tell-tale sign of a failed argument. Therefore, it behooves the Christian apologist to demonstrate this inconsistency and to that the atheist should acknowledge the fact of their indebtedness to a worldview for the purpose of repudiating the very world view that serves as its creditor.[42]

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[42] See Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis,* 105

Evil, Real Life, and Apologetics

Richard A Holland, Jr. [90]

What I want to address in this paper is the problem of evil as it is experienced in real life. I want to make a distinction between evil experienced in real life and evil presented in abstract or hypothetical philosophical examples. Instances of evil experienced in real life give rise to what I am calling the "Existential Problem of Evil," (EPE). I want to argue that the EPE is both a significant problem for Christian theism and a significant opportunity to advance the Christian worldview and the cause of the Gospel. In order to accomplish this purpose, I will begin by describing what I mean by "real life" evil and the EPE that arises from it, including comments on the nature of the problem, for whom it is a problem, and what kinds of responses in general are appropriate in light of the problem. Also, I will outline several elements of a potential apologetic response to the EPE, suggesting specifically that such a response should focus on: 1) an emphasis on the Genesis account of the Fall and resulting curse, 2) a defense of God's goodness focusing on redemption, and 3) pastoral comfort and the proclamation of the gospel message. Finally, I will attempt to address the EPE in light of atheism, proponents of which often cite evil and suffering in the world as positive evidence suggesting that God does not exist.

What is the Existential Problem of Evil?

It seems obvious that philosophical examples of evil and suffering are both convenient and helpful in analyzing the implications of evil for Christian theism. Such examples provide tools with which to conduct a philosophical analysis, develop a theodicy, and establish a context for serious discussion on whether belief in God is justified. In the midst of such philosophical analysis, however, it is essential for Christian apologists to make allowance for the fact that we simply do not live in a world comprised of hypothetical philosophical examples. Instead, we live in a world filled with "real life"– actual, rather than hypothetical – instances of evil, pain and suffering. Moreover, all actual human persons experience these instances. And so, the problem that arises from this "real life"

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evil is generally a different problem than that discussed in the philosophy classroom or during annual meetings of a philosophical society.

This is what I am calling the EPE. It arises at the occurrence of an actual "real life" instance of evil or suffering, and affects the person who is experiencing the evil—or one who is close to that person—in an existential way. I am using the term "existential" here because the kind of evil experienced by real people in real life can tend to cause a kind of crisis that touches the very root of the human experience. The EPE is a problem—and not an argument—because the occurrence of evil brings about an existential crisis that affects the person's attitude toward God, rather than presenting a direct rational or philosophical challenge to theism. It does not deal with the great amounts or widespread inequitable distribution of evil and suffering in the world; but rather the EPE is deeply personal, focusing on specific concrete events in the life of the human being for whom it is a problem. It is, as David Banach has said, "Your very own problem of evil."[91]

In a well-known essay, Alvin Plantinga describes this problem in the following way, "[F]aced with the shocking concreteness of a particularly appalling example of evil in his own life or the life of someone close to him, a believer may find himself tempted to take toward God an attitude he himself deplores; such evil can incline him to mistrust God, to be angry with him, to adopt toward him an attitude of suspicion and distrust or bitterness and rebellion."[92] Initially I am inclined to accept Plantinga's description. One of its strengths is that it properly highlights the existential nature of the crisis. The problem that arises from the EPE is not primarily an epistemic doubt about whether I am properly justified in my belief in God's existence. Rather, the EPE gives rise to a certain religious disposition toward God. The immediate problem is one of bitterness, rebellion, or distrust that takes place on an emotional or spiritual level; and Plantinga has done well to capture this idea.

But despite this strength, I think some important modifications must be made to Plantinga's description in order to identify properly the scope of the problem in view here, especially regarding the type of evil associated with the problem and the groups of people that might be affected by the problem. Plantinga highlights occasions of evil or suffering that are "shocking," and "particularly

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[91] David Banach, "Your Very Own Problem of Evil," http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/evil.htm

[92] Alvin Plantinga, "Epistemic Probability and Evil," in Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 69.

appalling." There are certainly examples of which all of us are probably aware, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, or the mass shooting at Virginia Tech that took place on April 16, 2007, or the devastation wrought by the tsunami in the Pacific in 2011. But in terms of whether or not the particular occurrence of evil gives rise to an existential problem, I do not think that only extreme and shocking examples of evil should be considered. While the more appalling instances of evil may elicit a heightened emotional response among a greater number of people, there are certainly occasions of evil, pain, and suffering that are less than shocking but nevertheless raise the same kinds of questions and elicit the same kind of response.

To give an example of what I mean, I will share a personal story. On April 3, 2009 I sat with my grandfather in a hospital room near Pittsburgh, PA. He was 95 years old and had been admitted with congestive heart failure and pulmonary edema to such an extent that he was barely able to breathe. My grandfather was not particularly troubled by the fact that he was going to die. He had reasoned in his mind that all people eventually die, and he could accept the fact that eventually his body would fail. What brought about an existential crisis, however, was the very real possibility (given his condition) that he would suffocate to death because of his pulmonary edema. His fear was that he would be consciously and painfully aware as he lost his ability to breathe, and that he would begin to panic as he struggled for breath—that he would slowly and painfully suffocate. It was the thought of this eventuality that brought about the crisis.

I think that the answer to the question of what kinds of evil give rise to the EPE is this: Rather than the magnitude or the shock value of the particular occurrence of evil, what brings about EPE are more likely to be those instances of evil that are seemingly pointless. What my grandfather could not easily accept was the possibility that he would die by slow, painful, agonizing suffocation. Such evil—while not particularly shocking or appalling—seems to be pointless, purposeless. And this phenomenon is often the charge made by the atheist in the evidential argument against God: an all-good God would *desire* to eliminate the evil in the world, as long as doing so would not bring about a worse evil or prevent a greater good (that is, God would want to eliminate gratuitous evil). And, they say, an all-powerful God *could* eliminate gratuitous evil in the world; and. And yet here we have instances in the real world of seemingly gratuitous evil. The EPE provides the underpinning for this evidential argument, and it is based on the real life examples of particular individuals.

What causes the EPE is not necessarily the "shock value" of the evil occurrence; rather it is the pointlessness of it. What greater good could possibly come from my grandfather dying a slow and painful death by suffocation? Or what greater evil could possibly come about through the alleviation of his suffering? The answer to both questions seems to be "none," and thus we have the EPE. So for these reasons I would add to Plantinga's description by asserting that the EPE applies not only to particularly shocking or appalling examples of evil, but to all actual instances of evil and suffering that seem to be gratuitous.

I would also amplify Plantinga's description with a clarification about the group of people for whom such examples of evil and suffering are a problem. Plantinga seems to restrict the EPE to those who are "believers"—an ambiguous term that may or may not refer to Christian theists—who react in anger or rebellion toward God in the face of evil or suffering. Marilyn Adams, in one of her essays on the topic, also suggests that the EPE is a problem particularly for Christians. She writes, "The problem of evil for *Christians* is posed by the question (Q1) How can I trust (or continue to trust) God in a world like this (in distressing circumstances such as these)?"[93]

While Plantinga's and Adams's descriptions are clearly applicable to Christians, it would seem that the EPE would also apply to other people as well. Certainly the occurrence of seemingly pointless evil in the life of a non-Christian—or even a non-theist—brings about an existential crisis equally serious to that arising in the life of the Christian. By virtue of the fact that even the non-believer bears the image of God, he has the capacity to ask—and indeed will ask—serious metaphysical (ontological and epistemological) questions in response to evil; and in times of crisis will re-evaluate previously held beliefs about the answers to those questions. Regardless of the temptation towards atheism, there will still be a deeply personal, emotional, and spiritual reaction; one of anger, bitterness, fear, rage, rebellion, and deep sorrow.

Further, from Romans chapter 1, we know that non-theists suppress their own intuitive knowledge of God. So atheists or non-Christians most likely will still have the inclination—despite their religious status or their disposition regarding belief about God—to respond with moral outrage and shake their fists towards the heavens in response to evil or suffering in their lives. Even though they may be confused with regard as to whom they should address their complaints,

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[93] Emphasis added. Marilyn M. Adams, "Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Response to the Problem of Evil," in *TPE: Selected Readings*, ed. Michael L. Peterson (Notre Dame: UND Press, 1992), 171.

nonbelievers will still ask, "Why me?" or "Why this?" The bitterness and rebellion of which Plantinga asserts that it will be present in the life of the believer will no doubt be present equally in the life of unbelievers as well, whether or not they intentionally direct their bitterness and rebellion toward the God of Christian theism. Based on these factors, it would seem that the EPE is equally problematic—and similarly symptomatic—for anyone, regardless of their disposition toward theism in general or Christianity in particular.

So, to summarize the modifications that I would make to Plantinga's description, the EPE as I understand it is brought about by all instances of seemingly pointless evil and suffering (shocking or not) in the life of any person (Christian or not) who is experiencing such evil. These instances of evil are likely to elicit an existential crisis that will incline the person to doubt whether God exists or is trustworthy, or has the attributes of absolute power and goodness, or whether there is any kind of justice in the universe. With this description of the nature of the EPE in hand, we are able to take steps toward developing an appropriate apologetic response.

What kind of response is appropriate?

In the same essay referenced above, Plantinga goes on to draw a distinction between the EPE and what is commonly referred to as simply the "problem of evil" in the philosophical literature. He writes that this more broad philosophical problem of evil, "is not . . . existential but broadly speaking epistemic; it has to do with fulfilling epistemic obligation, or maintaining a rational system of beliefs, or following proper intellectual procedure, or perhaps with practicing proper mental hygiene."[94] Plantinga is referring to what is now standard in philosophical literature on the topic. Even in its most modern and contemporary forms, the argument traces its heritage back to J. L. Mackie's 1955 article "Evil and Omnipotence," in which Mackie asserted that evil in the world is evidence, "not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational."[95] Of course more recently, the focus has been on the evidential argument, and so there are debates about the rationality of religious belief in the face of what appears to be instances of gratuitous evil or suffering. We have

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[94] Ibid.,

[95] J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," reprinted in *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, ed. Michael L. Peterson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 89.

William Rowe's hypothetical fawn in the forest fire, for example, offered as a test case in his argument to show that theism cannot rationally be maintained.[96]

The distinction that Plantinga draws between the EPE and the epistemic problem appears to be valid—and perhaps it is an important distinction to make. But, the discussion of different problems (one epistemic and one existential) naturally leads to the question of whether there should be different solutions. Since the EPE is different, does that mean our apologetic response to the EPE will not include elements that address the epistemic problem? What kind of response *is* appropriate in the face of the EPE?

Plantinga offers a suggestion intended to answer this question in his *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Concerning the EPE Plantinga writes, "Such a problem calls, not for philosophical enlightenment, but for pastoral care."[97] In fact Plantinga and—several other authors who address the subject—use the terms "religious," "pastoral," and "existential" interchangeably in this context. It is widely assumed that the only available and appropriate response to the EPE is one of pastoral care, extending an offer of comfort in the midst of suffering.

There is no doubt that the EPE does demand the kind of pastoral and religious care suggested by these authors. But there are at least two reasons that I think this approach is incomplete. First, the distinction between the EPE and the epistemic problem may be philosophically helpful, but it can be practically unwise to push this distinction to the point of suggesting two entirely different problems. As I have already pointed out, the EPE seems to be a very personal and "real life" form of the common evidential case employed by some atheologians. While the evidential argument in the philosophical literature deals with hypothetical philosophical examples (like Rowe's fawn in the forest fire), "real life" evil is highlighted in specific instances of seemingly pointless evil or suffering. Therefore, an appropriate apologetic response to the EPE will bring to bear the lessons learned in responding to the more abstract and theoretical evidential argument.

My second reason for thinking that the "pastoral care" approach alone in response to the EPE is inadequate is more important. It is this: no amount of pastoral care or offer of comfort can overcome the larger metaphysical questions elicited by the EPE. There can be little comfort found in a God who we suspect

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[96] William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 1–9.
[97] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 63–64.

might not exist, or might not be perfectly good or powerful, or who might not care about me. There can be little comfort found in a God who (for example) seems to capriciously prevent some suffering, but chooses not to prevent or alleviate *my* suffering. After all, what comfort can I can I gain upon hearing that God spared my neighbor's house from the tornado, while I have lost everything? Even if we are talking about only Christian theists in the EPE, the question remains: How can believers receive comfort in the midst of serious doubt about God's goodness or whether or not God is trustworthy or faithful, or cares about their personal pain and suffering? My point here is that in apologetics, it is unwise to separate the epistemic from the existential because in the actual life experience of real human beings it is *impossible* to separate the epistemic from the existential. Human beings are not fragmented compartments of emotion, reason, and faith. Rather, human beings are integrated wholes; and epistemic concerns and existential concerns are—and will remain—intertwined, especially in the crisis brought about by real life evil.

An Apologetic Approach

Given the above discussion, I am now able to highlight some elements of a potential apologetic response to the EPE that I think are essential. I am not here going to make a definitive argument for a complete solution to the problem. Rather, I want to suggest three key elements that are indispensible to an appropriate apologetic response to the EPE. In arriving at these three elements, I am guided by one particular principle: Christian apologetics, especially in light of the problem of evil, ought emphasize the unique features of the Christian worldview that distinguish it from other forms of theism.

It seems quite common in the literature for atheists to develop their arguments against very generic forms of theism. For example, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, he David Hume gives an illustration to the effect that when shipbuilders build ships, the faults and imperfections in the ships can be blamed on the shipbuilders.[98] And so it is implied that, since the theist claims God as the creator of the world, then the faults and imperfections observed in the world (such as evil and suffering) should be blamed on God. But Christians generally do not believe that God is the creator of the world in the same way that a shipbuilder is the creator of the ship. And the faults and imperfections in the ship are not at all like the evil in the world. Another example of what I am getting at here is evident even in the modern debate. Both Mackie and Rowe, for example,

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[98] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and the Posthumous Essays*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), Part V.

suggest that an all-good and all-powerful God would eliminate the kinds of evil we see in the world. But God being all-good and all-powerful is simply not the whole story. God is all-powerful, and God is all-good; but those are not the only factors that come into play. According to Christian theism, there is much more to it than that.

So what I am suggesting is that Christians ought not fall into the trap of attempting to mount a defense of some sort of generic theism with only the most basic elements included. There may be appropriate contexts in which Christians should seek common ground with other theists who are willing to adopt the more generic theistic ideas. But when the theistic common ground is attacked as irrational, it is time for the Christian to withdraw from the common ground and seek instead to focus on the unique elements of the Christian worldview that suggest that Christianity (as a unique and comprehensive system) is immune from the charge.

Given this overarching principle, there are three elements of the Christian worldview that I would suggest are essential elements of a proper apologetic response to the EPE: an emphasis on the Fall and the resulting curse as the primary explanation for the existence and persistence of evil in the world; a defense of God's goodness based primarily on God's plan of redemption for humanity and offer of salvation to individuals; and an offer of pastoral comfort centered around the call of the gospel.

The Fall

At the conclusion of the creation week, Scripture proclaims that God deemed all that he had made to be "very good" (Genesis 1:31). This declaration is especially significant given that the standard of evaluating the relative goodness of creation was none other than the wholly-good creator himself. The fact of creation's goodness in its original form rules out the possibility of evil and suffering being a part of the world as God created it (contrary to Hume's suggestion in the illustration of ship building). Clearly, in the first moments of creation, there existed the potential for evil, otherwise we would never have had evil in the world. But the potential for evil is not itself an evil.

While not made explicit, the creation account also strongly suggests that there was originally no death among either human or non-human living creatures. It seems clear that God's original intention, for example, was that only plants were given to living creatures for food. This notion stands in stark contrast to present circumstances where both humans and animals feed on other animal life. The implication is that death itself entered creation as a result of the Fall.

If I am correct in this assertion (and I am not unaware of the broad controversy surrounding it), this fact eliminates the possibility of such things as "evolutionary theodicy." Christopher Southgate, for example, in his attempt to develop such a theodicy argues that death, pain, and suffering are intrinsic to the process of evolution. He has further said that, "Death is a thermodynamic necessity. It would be impossible to imagine biological life without it."[99] To which I would respond: Death is not a thermodynamic necessity if the Bible is true in its account of special creation. I am certainly not suggesting that creation in its original form contained no entropic processes, but the decay in animal and human life was not decay leading to death. And so I am willing to concede, that, if an atheistc theory of evolution, which goes contrary to the factual assertions of Genesis is true, then the position I am taking in this paper on this point is in need of revision.

The Fall of Adam was the precipitating event for the existence of every form of evil in the world. Moral evil tainted man's nature such that Adam and all his progeny would choose to rebel against God's goodness. Natural evil is also explained by this phenomenon; and so I must emphasize that so-called "natural evil" has at its root "moral evil." What we refer to as natural evil is nothing more than the result of God's curse on mankind and creation, and his judgment against sin. Thorns sprung up from the ground and presumably pierced the flesh of the first human beings. Work became physically strenuous. Childbearing became painful when it otherwise would not have been. Animals died, particularly to supply human needs; first for clothing and then for food. Nature itself fell and was corrupted by sin and began to bear the marks of the curse. As a result, people and animals are now vulnerable to predatory attacks, disease resulting from changes in microorganisms after the Fall, decay leading to degeneration and death, volcanoes, tornadoes, and all manner of environmental and so-called "natural disasters." In short, Christianity asserts that evil—of either the natural or moral kind—was not present in the original creation, but was introduced by the moral choice of mankind to rebel against God's good intentions.

Defense of God's Goodness in light of Redemption

So in the Fall, we have a reasonable explanation for the existence of evil. But in spite of this explanation (in the case of a particular instance of real life evil) the one who is suffering may still be tempted to say, "But why would God allow

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[99] Christopher Southgate, "Evolutionary Theodicy," *Zygon* 37:4 (December 2002): 805.

it to continue? Why would God allow *me* to suffer in *this* way?" What the EPE seems to demand is an answer to the question of why God would refrain from intervening to eliminate the evil being experienced. And so in addition to pointing to the Fall as the origin of evil, an appropriate apologetic response to the EPE will also include a defense of God's moral goodness in the midst of personal pain and suffering that he did not prevent and does not alleviate.

There are many issues that should be explored and discussed related to this question, but I want to highlight only one that should serve as a prominent part of the answer: Redemption. Perhaps the clearest expression of God's goodness in the face of evil and suffering is his provision for redemption and restoration for mankind and all of creation. The Christian system asserts that all human beings participate in the Fall by nature and by choice. And so on the face of it, divine judgment would be an adequate explanation for why we suffer, for judgment against sin is an expression of God's righteousness. As Marilyn Adams has said, "He [God] would not be wrong to judge us, even if no benefit accrued to us thereby."[100]

But we know that God's refraining from intervening in any particular occurrence of evil in the world is an aspect of his desires and redemptive plans for mankind. 2 Peter 3:9 for example assures us that God is not now neglecting his promise of final salvation, but is patient because he wants all to come to repentance that they might not perish. And this is at least part of the answer to the question of why God does not intervene to prevent or alleviate evil in general, and also in the particular instance of evil that has brought about a particular existential crisis.

It must further be noted that redemption is not limited to moral evils and human beings only. Biblical prophecy pointing to the ultimate fulfillment of God's redemptive plans speak of natural evil coming to an end as well, as symbolized in the enmity between creatures. Isaiah 11:6–9 foretells a day when the wolf and lamb will live together, and likewise, the leopard and the goat. It tells us that there will be a day when a small child will lead both the calf and the young lion; the cow and bear will both graze on vegetation together; and even the lion will eat straw like an ox. It tells us that even when a child puts his hand in the den of a viper, the viper will not harm him. Presumably, then, Rowe's fawn will no longer be in danger of suffering excruciating burns and eventual death from a forest fire in this future time. God has ultimate plans to eradicate evil from the world, to redeem not just mankind, but also his good creation.

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[100] Adams, "Redemptive," 175.

And so, when my house is destroyed by the tornado, and my loved ones are killed or injured, but my neighbor's house remains untouched and my neighbor's family remains unharmed, it is not because I am a worse sinner or my neighbor a greater saint. Rather, I can know that God's desire is to redeem us all from this sin-marred world of pain and suffering; and any delay in the fulfillment of that desire is the result not of some particular sin in my life, nor from God's slackness (or worse, capriciousness), but rather testimony that God wants to redeem even me.

Pastoral Comfort & The Gospel

Indeed, it is this point that leads to the final element necessary for a proper Christian apologetic response: Namely, we see that there is a unique kind of ultimate comfort available to the one who is in the midst of experiencing real life evil. In light of the events of creation and the Fall, and in light of God's plan of redemption and restoration, we can offer comfort to the unbeliever. We can put our arms around the persons whose house has been destroyed and whose loved ones have been killed, and we can agree with them that things are not the way they are supposed to be. We realize that the state of affairs in which we find ourselves is a temporary evil between two very great goods. We live in a time subsequent to the great good of creation as it originally was; and we now await the final redemption of the world, longing for the day when the wolf and the lamb will lie down together and the tears shed for all manner of pain and suffering will be finally wiped away.

Jesus said, "Come to me all you who labor and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). There is a sense in which trusting in Christ for salvation provides a unique and powerful kind of comfort. Just as the EPE is an intensely personal form of the generic problem of evil; so the call of the Gospel is an intensely personal application of God's plan of redemption and the ultimate eradication of evil from the world. And so Christian apologists should offer the comfort of Christ and his call on the unbeliever to repentance and faith.

The EPE and Atheism

From the perspective of some of the more influential proponents of atheism, the debate on the question of God's existence is over, and they have won. It is no longer considered a matter deserving of serious academic and philosophical reflection. The fact that there is seemingly pointless evil in the world is decisive evidence against God's existence. But there are two reasons that I think that atheists' use of the argument from evil does little to advance their cause. In light

of the above discussion, then, I want to highlight these reasons as being important considerations in the apologetic response to evil.

The first reason that arguing from evil does little to advance atheism is that the argument itself is a kind of moral argument. But objective morality is unavailable in a naturalistic, atheistic worldview. This is the argument that Mark Nelson made in the early 1990s (and no doubt many other writers at many other times). Nelson points out that for the naturalist, there can be no universal moral law, and therefore there is no objective standard for evaluating particular natural occurrences as "evil." He writes that "moral judgments are relativized to the speaker's attitudes in much the same way as statements of taste are."[101] In an atheistic universe, events simply occur. Facts are merely facts. There can be no objective judgment as to the moral value of certain events. As much as the atheist might try, it is simply not possible (in an atheistic world) to make the move from "is" to "ought." A person might be able to express a preference for one type of occurrence over another, but such a predilection says nothing about objective moral value. So-called evil occurrences certainly cannot count against God's existence, because without God, we would not be able to recognize them as objectively "evil." Therefore, when the atheist employs the argument from evil, he has no choice but first to assume that an element of the theistic worldview is true: namely that there is an objective moral standard by which events can be judged and properly called good or evil.

The second reason that I think the argument from evil does little to help the atheist is that in the end, atheism is wholly unsatisfying in the face of the EPE. If atheism were true, then we should suspect that there would be no moral outrage, no sense of bitterness or rebellion in the face of some existential crisis brought about by a particular instance of seemingly pointless evil or suffering. If there is really is no God, then the event that brought about our existential crisis is no more or less significant than any other event or occurrence in our lives. Again, Mark Nelson's essay is appropriate as he points out that "one cannot coherently believe that God doesn't exist and also be angry with him because he created the world" in the way that he did.[102]

But as I have been pointing out in this essay, and as each of us intuitively knows, existential evil *is* obviously a problem. And the authors who address the topic of the EPE consistently remark that some sort of pastoral comfort is

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[101] Mark T. Nelson, "Naturalistic Ethics and the Argument from Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 8:3 (July 1991): 373.
[102] Ibid., 368.

necessary in response to the EPE. Some kind of solution must be offered in the face of the existential crisis if all hopelessness is to be avoided. There is no doubt that it is a serious challenge for Christian theism to offer the appropriate kind of comfort to one facing such an existential crisis (as I have suggested above). But what is challenging for the Christian is *impossible* for the atheist. What comfort is it to think that in the end, there is no ultimate objective value to our lives? If God does not exist, to whom do we direct our moral outrage? Moreover, implicit in the atheistic worldview is the fact that our sense of moral outrage in the face of evil must be some kind of genetic or biochemical anomaly. Atheism purports to tell us that the deeply moral and spiritual response we have to evil in our lives is nothing more than a particular type of electrical activity in the brain. But electrical activity in the brain requires no comfort. And we should be relieved at that thought, because if our existential crisis is only electrical activity of the brain, no comfort is available.

But as I have already suggested, existential evil is a problem that does indeed require a solution. While it is a challenge for Christians to offer such a solution, is an impossible task for atheists. Since atheism has little or nothing to offer in response to evil (except perhaps to complain against God). But all people face this problem, regardless of their disposition toward theism. This reality confirms that EPE, far from being a defeater of Christianity, is actually a prime opportunity for Christians to defend the Christian worldview and advance the cause of the Gospel, and, in doing so, offer to the one suffering the only kind of real comfort that will ever be available.

Defending Inerrancy: A Response to Methodological Unorthodoxy

Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach[1]

Brief Background of the Discussion[2]

In the past generation the debate about inerrancy has shifted from the domain of bibliology to that of methodology; from what the Bible affirms about itself to how the Bible should be interpreted. Most evangelicals who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible would agree with the Lausanne Covenant statement: "We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice…." Of course, the Bible is true in all it affirms, but the question has refocused on specifically the content that the Bible is affirming in a given passage. Or, to put it another way, evangelicals do not so much debate whether the Bible is "true," but what is meant by "true," and how we know such truth.

Viewed from a historical perspective, the current movement has been away from unlimited inerrancy view of the total truthfulness of Scripture, as defended by Hodge and Warfield, to a form of limited inerrancy[3] which Jack

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[2] For background on the significant changes occurring among evangelicals regarding ICBI, see Jason S. Sexton, "How Far Beyond Chicago? Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Inerrancy Debate," *Themelios* 34/1 (April 2009) n. p.

[3] We need not address the additional problem that the very term "unlimited inerrancy" is a paradox. However, the redundancy is made necessary by the fact that some have limited the inerrancy of Scripture to redemptive or spiritual matters.

Rogers of Fuller Seminary and Donald McKim embraced, when they claimed that the Bible was unerring in its redemptive purpose, but not always in all of its factual affirmations.[4]   Rogers and McKim reacted to what they perceived to be the current view of inerrancy, which they misrepresented with the constant refrain: "To erect a standard of modern, technical precision in language as the hallmark of biblical authority was totally foreign to the foundation shared by the early church."   Instead, they termed the view to which they reacted a "rationalistic extreme" and asserted that "the central church tradition . . . more flexible than seventeenth-century scholasticism or nineteenth-century fundamentalism."[5]   And again, "For early Christian teachers, Scripture was wholly authoritative as a means of bringing people to salvation and guiding them in the life of faith . . . Scripture was not used as a sourcebook for science."[6] The opinion of a number of scholars has shifted from the unlimited inerrancy of *The International Council of Biblical Inerrancy* (ICBI) to the limited inerrancy of Clark Pinnock in his *Scripture Principle* which allowed for minor mistakes and errors in the biblical text while retaining an inerrancy of purpose.[7]

Craig Blomberg of Denver Seminary blames defection from the faith on the fact that evangelical Christians had been aggressively promoting plenary, verbal inspiration. He wrote: "The approach, famously supported back in 1976 by Harold Lindsell in his *Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan), that it is an all-or-nothing approach to Scripture that we must hold, is both profoundly mistaken and deeply dangerous. No historian worth his or her salt functions that way." He adds, "But, despite inerrancy being the touchstone of the largely American organization called the Evangelical Theological Society, there are countless evangelicals in the States and especially in other parts of the world who hold that the Scriptures are inspired and authoritative, even if not inerrant, and they are not sliding down any slippery slope of any kind. I can't help but wonder if inerrantist evangelicals making inerrancy the watershed for so much has not, unintentionally, contributed to pilgrimages like Ehrman's. Once someone finds one apparent mistake or contradiction that they cannot resolve, then they believe the Lindsells of the world and figure they have to chuck it all. What a tragedy!"[8]

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[4] Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

[5] Ibid., xxii, xxiii.

[6] Ibid., 457-58.

[7] Clark Pinnock*, The Scripture Principle*. Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

[8] http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2008/03/26/interview-with-craig-blomberg/ One might take note of the phenomenon that, no sooner had Blomberg protested against a "slippery slope" argument, he applied one directly to Bart Ehrman.

From the time of Robert Gundry (1983), who was asked to resign from ETS by an overwhelming 70% vote of the members, to the present there has been a growing movement away from unlimited inerrancy to limited inerrancy, the most recent being inerrancy of authorial intention by genre determination. This has come to focus recently in the work of Mike Licona in his book *The Resurrection of Jesus (2010)* in which he claimed, along with many other evangelical New Testament (NT) scholars, that one must make an up-front determination of genre categories of the type of literature we are dealing with before we approach the Gospels to decide which category they fit into.[9] Licona admits the significant influence of Charles H. Talbert, Distinguished Professor of Religion at Baylor University, as well as British scholar and Dean of King's College London, the Reverend Doctor Richard A. Burridge.[10] He wrote, "Before we can read the gospels, we have to discover what kind of books they might be."[11] Supposedly, by a study of the Roman (and Jewish) literature of the time, Licona comes to the NT with a genre category already set, claiming, that "**[t]here is somewhat of a consensus among contemporary scholars that the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography (*bios*).**" Then he goes on to say that "*Bioi* offered the ancient biographer great flexibility for rearranging material and **inventing speeches . . . and they often included legend.** Because *bios* was a flexible genre, **it is often difficult to determine where history ends and legend begins.**"[12] With this category in mind, he looks at the Gospel record and concludes that it best fits into this "Greco-Roman biography" which allows for "legend," "inventing speeches," "embellishment," and permitting other factual errors. Thus, when he looks at the story of the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27:51-54, he concluded that it is "poetical," a "legend," an

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The truth is that the very fact that this entire debate is taking place testifies to the existence of the slope and that it is quite slippery. Admittedly, the "all or nothing at all" argument is fallacious when used of the Bible, if one is speaking only of its reliability. For it could be reliable in general, even if not in all particulars. However, when speaking of the Bible *as the Word of God*, finding just one real error would undermine its claim to be the Word of God in everything it affirms. For finding even one error would reduce it to the level of any other purely human book.

[9] Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 34, 54, 96, 143, 186, 202-204, 338-339, 548-553, 570, 593, 596-597.

[10] Ibid., See Charles H. Talbert, *What is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*. Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004).

[11] Burridge, *Gospels*, 324.

[12] See Licona, *Resurrection*, 34, emphasis added in these citations.

"embellishment," and a literary "special effects." [13] He also presents **"A possible candidate for embellishment is John 18:4-6"** [emphasis added] where, when Jesus claimed "I am he" (cf. John 8:58), his pursuers "drew back and fell on the ground."[14] Furthermore, Licona adds, "Considerations of genre, the demand for quality evidence, and methodological controls are important for all claims to historicity. In principle, a historian of Jesus might conclude that the resurrection hypothesis warrants a judgment of historicity while simultaneously concluding that certain elements of the Gospel narratives were mythical or were created while knowing only the historical kernel, such as that Jesus had healed a blind person."[15]

These methodological concerns bring us to our next consideration of the two different views of hermeneutics.

<div align="center">**Two Views of Hermeneutics in Contrast**</div>

Now granted Licona's methodological presuppositions, these are not unreasonable conclusions. But this is precisely the problem, namely, there is no good reason to grant his methodology. Indeed, it is, as we shall see, another case of methodological unorthodoxy, not unlike that which Robert Gundry held and which led to his expulsion from ETS. The following chart summarizes the radical differences in the traditional historical grammatical view, adopted by ICBI, and that of "The New Historiographical Approach" of Licona and other contemporary evangelical NT scholars. Before we compare the two, we note that not everyone who holds one of more of these views would hold to the entire method named at the top. However, most scholars who hold the method would hold most of the views listed below.

NAME OF METHOD	TRADITIONAL HISTORICAL-GRAMMATICAL VIEW	THE NEW HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH
Language	Realism	Cultural Linguistic Conventionalism
Epistemology	Correspondence View of Truth	Intentionalist View of Truth[16]

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[13] Ibid., 34, 306, 548, 552, 553.

[14] Ibid., 306, n. 114.

[15] Ibid., 570.

[16] Licona claims to hold a correspondence view of truth but modifies it by insisting that "our knowledge of the past may not mirror reality" and may present "a blurred picture of

Intent of Author	Always Expressed in the Text Known only from the Text in Context	Not Always Expressed in the Text[17] Can be Known from Extra-Biblical Texts
Extra-Biblical Data	Can Illuminate Meaning of a Text Can Illuminate Meaning of Bible Words	Can Determine the Truth of a Text Can Determine Truth of a Sentences
Genre Types	Decided After Examining the Text Determined by the Text and Context	Decided Before Examining the Text Decided by Other Texts and Contexts
Nature of Meaning	Found in *What* not Why the Text Says True Meaning is the Author's Meaning	Found in *Why* not Just What a Text Says True Meaning is Reader's Meaning[18]
Number of Meanings	ONE: *Sensus Unum*	MANY: *Sensus Plenior*
Role of Context	Meaning Known from Author's Context Biblical Context is Determinative	Meaning known from Reader's Context Extra-Biblical Context can be Determinative
Historicity	Presumed in a Narrative Text	Not Presumed in a Narrative Text[19]

what occurred," (Ibid., 92). Indeed, it may contain legend and not history (Ibid., 35, 306).

[17] Ibid., 92.

[18] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. Second Revised Edition. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Crossroad, 2004 [1975, 1989]; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutic and Philosophical Speculation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1980); Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

[19] Licona, *Resurrection,* 97-99.

Legend	Not found in a Narrative Text	Sometimes Found in a Narrative Text[20]
Symbolic	Can Represent Literal Events	Can Replace Literal Events
Figures of Speech	Must have Literal Referent	Need not have a literal Referent
Inspiration	Formally Distinct from Interpretation	Actually Separated from Interpretation[21]
Inerrancy	Unlimited (to all of the text)	Limited (to part of the text)[22]
Theological Truth	Lends itself to Systematic Theology Truth is in the Meaning of the Text Propositional Truth is Important	Lends itself to Biblical Theology Truth is in the Significance of the Text Propositional Truth is Diminished[23]

A Defense of the Historical-Grammatical View

Space allotted does not permit a detailed explanation of each point, nor a complete defense of "the Historical-Grammatical View" on the points listed. So, our comments will be limited to certain key points. For brevity we will call this the Traditional Approach (TA). The New Historiographical Approach we will label the New Approach (NA).

Language and Meaning

The TA is based on a realistic view of meaning, whereas the NA is based on a conventionalist view of meaning. Realists believe there is an objective basis for meaning and conventionalists do not. Both sides agree that *words* or symbols are

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[20] Ibid., 185-86; 570.

[21] Ibid., 208.

[22] Ibid., 596.

[23] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation," Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutic, *JETS* 48/1 (March 2008) 89-115.

culturally relative, but unlike realists, conventionalists hold that all *meaning* is also culturally relative.[24]

However, there are many good reasons for an evangelical to reject a conventionalist view of meaning.[25] First of all, if true then there could be no objective meaning or truth. Since all true statements are meaningful, it would follow that all meaning is also culturally relative. For to be a true statement is must be meaningful. But this is clearly contrary to the traditional, historic, and creedal confessions of evangelicalism which proclaim that certain essential beliefs are objective truth about reality.[26] Second, it is self-defeating to claim that "All meaning is subjective." For that very statement claims to be objectively meaningful. So, the NA is based on a faulty subjectivists view of meaning.

Locus of Meaning

According to the TA, the meaning of a text is found in w*hat* the text affirms, not in *why* the text affirms it. Since we have defended this view elsewhere,[27] we will simply use one illustration here. Exodus commands: "Do not boil a kid (baby goat) in its mother's milk" (Ex.34:26). The meaning of this text is very clear, and every Israelite knew exactly *what* to do. However, as a survey of a few commentaries will reveal, it is not at all clear to us *why* they were commanded to do this. So, meaning (what) can be understood apart from purpose (why). This is not to say that knowing purpose is not sometimes illuminating. Nor does it claim that purpose does not add to the significance of a statement. It often does. For example, if I say "Come over to my home tonight at 7 p.m," the meaning of the statement is very clear. However, if you know that my reason (purpose) for inviting you over was to give you a million dollars, then that detail adds significance to the statement—and to your motivation for coming! But the statement is clear and meaningful apart from what the purpose(s) might have been.

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[24] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (NY: Macmillan, 1953) I:19, 23, 241; II, 194, 226.

[25] See Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), Chapter 6; John O'Callaghan, *Thomistic Realism and the Linguistic Turn* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2003).

[26] See Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *Conviction without Compromise: Standing Strong in the Core Beliefs of the Christian Faith* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2008), Part One; Philip Schaaf*, The Creeds of Christendom*. Sixth Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), vol. 1: The History of the Creeds.

[27] See Norman L. Geisler, "The Relation of Purpose and Meaning in Interpreting Scripture" in *Grace Theological Journal* 5/2 (Fall 1984), 229-245.

As we demonstrated, Jack Rogers and Clark Pinnock clearly adopted this purpose-determines-meaning approach.[28] Licona appears to do the same in his misdirected use of "the author's intent."[29] For the fact is that we have no valid way to get at the biblical author's intent except by what is expressed in the text of Scripture. Further, the problem of not placing the locus of meaning in the text is that apart from doing so we are left with no objective way to determine the meaning.[30] We are left with subjective and extra-biblical ways of determining what the text actually meant, and often we can never know that meaning for sure. Unfortunately, this is the point at which many NT scholars, primarily following the lead of E.P. Sanders and N.T. Wright, turn to extra-biblical data, such as Second Temple Judaism, to help them determine what the text means.[31]

True Meaning is the Author's Meaning

According to the TA, the true meaning of a text is found in what the author meant by it, not in what the reader(s) may mean by it. A text means exactly what an author means by it and not what someone else means by it. To claim otherwise is self-defeating. For no author, no matter how post-modern he may be, allows that his book should be taken to mean anything but what he meant it to mean. Otherwise, a reader would be able to reject or reverse what an author meant and to replace it by what he wants it to mean. For example, Kevin Vanhoozer claims that one cannot say, as the ICBI did in its widely accepted "Chicago Statement," that "the Bible is true and reliable in all matters it addresses (Art. XI)." Why? Because, strictly speaking, "'it' neither affirms nor addresses; authors do."[32] However, an ICBI framer, R.C. Sproul, in a personal letter to me [William Roach], responds to Kevin Vanhoozer stating:

> But you asked particularly the question regarding Vanhoozer's statement where he distinguishes between what the Bible addresses and what men or authors do. His statement, strictly speaking, *it* doesn't

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Licona, *Resurrection,* 85, 195.

[30] For an excellent defense of objectivity in Hermeneutics, see Thomas Howe, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation* (Atamonte Springs, FL: Advantage Books), 2004.

[31] Kevin Vanhoozer*, Is There Meaning In This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CONN: Yale University, 1967); E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993); *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); *The Resurrection and the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); *Paul: Fresh Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

[32] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation?, 106.

affirm or address anything, only authors do. This is worse than pedantic. It's simply silly. When we're talking about the Bible, the inerrancy position makes it clear that the Bible is a book written human authors, which authors address various matters. And whatever these authors address within the context of sacred Scripture, while under the supervision of the Holy Spirit, carries the full weight of inerrancy. It would seem to me that if somebody is trying to avoid the conclusions that the Chicago Statement reaches regarding inerrancy, it's a far reach to avoid them by such a distinction. In the final analysis, the distinction is a distinction without a difference [June 30, 2010].

Of course, the author speaks through a medium (language) that is common to both the author and reader. But the meaning embedded in that medium (language) is the author's meaning, not the reader's meaning or anyone else's meaning. And it is the reader's obligation to discover what the author's meaning encoded in that language actually was by decoding it, not to make up his own meaning.

Intent of Author is Expressed in the Text

Burridge made it clear that the intention or purpose of the author is "essential" in determining the meaning of a text.[33] The NA stresses the "intention" of the author, but it rejects what the TA means by "intention." First, "intention" can mean *purpose*, and we have already shown why purpose does not determine meaning. Second, "intention" can mean *unexpressed intention* that is not found in the text or in its context (see next point). But this is not what the TA means by use of the word "intention." The TA means *expressed intention* (i.e., meaning), that is, intention that is expressed in the text and which can be derived from the text by a reader who reads it properly in its context. Only this kind of expressed intention is objectively determinable. Unexpressed intention leaves the door of interpretation wide open to misinterpretation. Indeed, it leaves us with no objective way to discover the meaning of a text since there is no objective meaning expressed in the text. The true meaning of a text is not found *beyond* the text (in some extra-biblical texts),[34] or *beneath* the text (in some mystical

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[33] Burridge, *Gospels*, 121.

[34] N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 89-113; Darrell L. Bock, "The Historical Jesus, An Evangelical View," in *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*. Eds. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009).

intuition), or *behind* the text (in the author's unexpressed intention).[35] Meaning is like beauty in that the beauty of a painting is not found *behind* it (in the painters mind), nor *beyond* it (in the painter's purpose), but beauty is found expressed *in* the painting. Likewise, the real meaning of a text is found *in* the text as understood in its textual context. The author is the *efficient* cause of the meaning in the text, individual words are the *instrumental* cause used to express meaning, but meaning itself is found in the *formal cause*, the actual form these words take in a sentence, in a paragraph, and in the overall context of the book.

The Role of Context in Meaning

As just noted, meaning is found in a sentence (the smallest unit of meaning) in its context. Technically, single words in and of themselves have no meaning;[36] they merely have *usage* in a sentence which does have meaning. Furthermore, words do not just point to meaning; instead, they receive meaning by the biblical author when placed into a sentence. And biblical meaning is found in the biblical context. As the ICBI framers put it, "Scripture is to interpret Scripture" (Article XVIII). It adds, "WE INVITE RESPONSE TO THIS STATEMENT FROM ANY WHO SEE REASON TO **AMEND ITS AFFIRMATIONS ABOUT SCRIPTURE BY THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE ITSELF,** UNDER WHOSE INFALLIBLE AUTHORITY WE STAND AS WE SPEAK" (ICBI, PREAMBLE, EMPHASIS ADDED). As the old adage put it, "a text out of its context is a pretext." The only proper way to interpret the Bible is by the Bible. Every text is to be understood in its context in its paragraph, in its book, and, if needed, by other Scripture. For as the Reformers taught us through their "Analogy of Faith," the Bible is the best interpreter of the Bible.

Extra-biblical data or contexts cannot be determinative of the meaning of a biblical text. It can illuminate usage of words and customs, but it should never be used hermeneutically to determine the meaning of a biblical text. This is why the ICBI framers exhorted: "We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship" (Article XVIII).

The Role of Extra-Biblical Data

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[35] Paul Ricœur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*. Edited with Introduction by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

[36] Of course, there are single word sentences like "Go," but they have an implied subject meaning "[You] go."

This lead to an important distinction between the two views in the use of extra-biblical data.   According to the TA position, extra-biblical data can illuminate meaning of a text (i.e., reveal some of its significance), but it cannot determine the meaning or truth of a text.   All the factors to determine the meaning of a biblical text are in the text taken in its context.[37]

Of course, individual words used in that text, especially *hapax legomena* (words only used once in the Bible), can be illuminated by extra-biblical usage of these terms but this extra-biblical usage cannot determine truth of a biblical sentence. The form (*formal cause*) of meaning is the text itself.   At best, extra-biblical data can only help us understand the meaning of a word (which is part of the *material cause*), but it cannot determine the meaning of the text itself.   The word is only a part of the total form in the grammatical structure of the text—which structure we get only in the text itself.   Words are like pieces in a puzzle; they can be key to completing the picture, but they are only a piece of the picture. The picture (the form) itself is found only in the text (the whole picture).   Either the piece (word) fits or it does not fit into the picture (form) found in the text.

Also, extra-biblical data can illuminate customs expressed in a text, but they cannot determine the meaning or truth of the passage which that custom is found in.   Thus, commands about taking a staff, wearing sandals, or kissing the brethren are illuminated by the culture, but they do not determine the truth of any biblical passage in which they are found.   And to borrow a Jewish or Greco-Roman legend to determine the meaning of a biblical text is methodologically misdirected and can lead to what is theologically tragic, namely, denying the historicity of the text.[38]   For example, the fact that there were ancient creation or flood stories other than the Bible can illuminate (and even help confirm) the biblical story, but they should not replace it, nor should they be used to undermine the historicity of the biblical stories.   Thus, ICBI declared: "We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood" (Article XII).   And the official ICBI commentary adds, "We deny that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual."   Further, "Some, for instance, take Adam to be a

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[37] See John H. Sailhamer, "The Hermeneutics of Premillennialism," *Faith and Mission* 18/1 (2000) 96-109; *The Meaning of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009).

[38] See Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

myth, whereas in Scripture he is presented as a real person. Others take Jonah to be an allegory when he is presented as a historical person and [is] so referred to by Christ" (EH Article XIII).[39]

Correspondence view of Truth

These considerations lead to another important difference between the TA and the NA. The historical-grammatical approach implies a correspondence view of truth. But the new hermeneutic often entails an intentionalist view of truth. Truth as correspondence means a statement is true if it corresponds to the facts, to the reality to which it points. Intentionalists, on the other hand, claim that truth is found in the author's intent (purpose) which we cannot always know from the biblical text itself, but sometimes only by the determination of a literary genre based outside of the biblical text itself. But if truth is found in intention, whether the intention is redemption or anything else beneficial, then any well-intended statement is true, even if it is mistaken—which is patently absurd.

Further, there are fatal flaws in the intentionalist view of truth. One of them was implied by a proponent of the view himself. Clark Pinnock wrote, "I supported the 1978 Chicago Statement of The international Council on Biblical Inerrancy," noting that Article XIII "made room for nearly every well-intentioned Baptist…."[40] He was referring to Article XIII which said that "We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose." But this is clearly contrary to what the ICBI framers meant by inerrancy, as is revealed in its official commentary on those very articles. ICBI declared explicitly "When we say that the truthfulness of Scripture ought to be evaluated according to its own standards that means that … all the claims of the Bible must correspond with reality, whether that reality is historical, factual or spiritual" (Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy [EI]*, 41). It adds, "By biblical standards truth and error is meant the view used both in the Bible and in everyday life, viz., a correspondence view of truth. This part of the article is directed toward who would redefine truth to relate merely to redemptive intent, the purely personal, or the like, rather than to mean that which corresponds with reality" (Sproul EI, 43-44).

Further, the denial of the correspondence view of truth is self-defeating. For the claim that "Truth is not what corresponds to reality" is itself a statement that

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[39] See Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam* (Grand Rapids: Baker/Brazos, 2012); John Polkinghorne, *Testing Scripture: A Scientist Explores the Bible* (Baker/Brazos, 2011); Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 202-203.

[40] Clark Pinnock, *Scripture Principle*. Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006) 266.

implicitly claims that it corresponds to reality. This is to say nothing of the fact that the Bible everywhere assumes a correspondence view of truth, as do people in their everyday lives.[41]   Likewise, both science and the courts assume a correspondence view of truth.[42] So, the correspondence view of truth is biblical, unavoidable, and rationally undeniable. But the "New Historiographical View" rejects the traditional correspondence view for a modified position by affirming a "blurred [correspondence] picture" of what occurred with the "intention" of the author.[43]

Use of Genre Types in Scripture[44]

Virtually everyone agrees that there are different genre in Scripture: narratives (Acts), poetry (Psalms), parables (Gospels), and even allegory (Gal. 4). There are also figures of speech, including hyperbole (Mt. 23:24), simile (Psa. 1:3), metaphor (Psa. 18:2), symbolic language (Rev. 1:20), and so on. These are not in dispute. What is in dispute between the TA and NA methods of interpretation is whether genre determination made apart from the biblical text can be used as hermeneutically determinative of the meaning of a biblical text.[45] Clearly the "New Historiographical Approach" espoused by Licona and other evangelicals holds that it can.[46]   For Licona argued that that "**there is somewhat of a consensus among contemporary scholars that the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography (*bios*).**"[47] But how could they know this genre classification before they ever look at the biblical text.[48]   Maybe the

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[41] See Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, in One Volume (Baker, 2012), chapter 7.

[42] See Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 233-253.

[43] Licona, *Resurrection*., 85, 195.

[44] See: "Genre Criticism," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and The Bible*. Eds. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 165-216.

[45] See Tom Howe, "Does Genre Determine Meaning?," *Christian Apologetics Journal* (SES) 6/1 (Spring 2007) 2-17.

[46] See Andreas Köstenberger and Richard Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregal Academic and Professional, 2011), 237-574; Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?*(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) ; Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb, Eds. *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

[47] Licona, *Resurrection.,* 34, 54, 202-204, 548-553, emphasis added.

[48] Kevin Vanhoozer tries to redefine himself as a literary inerrantist. But this is little more than the syncretizing of genre-criticism and the traditional categories of inerrancy.

Gospels are a unique genre category of their own.[49]   Maybe, despite some similarities with Greco-Roman biography, the Gospels are a unique category of their own that can only be known by examining the Gospels themselves and their relation to the rest of Scripture.   Or, perhaps the Gospels are in the broad category of redemptive history. But, as the ICBI framers remind us, "Though the Bible is indeed *redemptive* history, it is also redemptive *history*, and this means that the acts of salvation wrought by God actually occurred in the space-time world" (Sproul, EI, 37).

According to the traditional historical-grammatical interpretation, the genre types that are applicable to the biblical text are not fixed outside of the biblical text.[50]   They are decided by examining the biblical text itself with the historical-grammatical method and discovering whether they should be taken literally or not.   ICBI declared: "We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations." (Article XIII).   But all of this is determined by looking at the phenomena of Scripture itself, not by making external genre decisions.[51]

As we will show below, the TA has the presumption of literalness, unless proven to the contrary.[52]   Hence, if the text says this is it a "parable," an "allegory" (cf. Gal. 4:24) or it is only "like" what it is speaking about, then there are grounds for taking it in a non-literal sense.   Even then symbols and other figures of speech often contain a literal truth about a literal truth.   For example, while calling God a rock is a metaphor (since the Bible says he **is** "Spirit"—Jn. 4:24), nonetheless, God does have rock-like characteristics, such durability and stability.

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[49] Burridge appears to be inconsistent at this point, claiming both that genre categories are determined before we come to the text (*Gospels*, 324) and yet that genre "must be discovered by internal examination" of the text (Ibid., 55).

[50] See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. "Legitimate Hermeneutics," in *Inerrancy*. Ed. Norm Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 116-147; *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1985).

[51] J. I. Packer, "Encountering Present-Day Views of Scripture," in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*. Ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 61-82.

[52] J. I. Packer, '*Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 11, 99, 102 ff.

Another difficulty with the idea that genre "gives meaning" view is that the interpreter must read the text and attempt to discern the patterns that would indicate conformity to the characteristics of a particular genre.[53] This requires that the person have a rudimentary knowledge of the text prior to classifying the genre. This rudimentary knowledge occurs when a person approaches the text according to the historical-grammatical interpretive methodology, which goes from the particulars to the whole.[54] Furthermore, the idea that genre determines meaning suffers from another logical mistake. In order to discover the genre of a particular text, one must already have a developed a genre theory. As Professor Howe notes: "But a genre theory comes from studying and comparing individual texts, and this is done prior to and apart from genre classification. If this is so, then it must be the case that there is some meaning communicated to the interpreter apart from whether the interpreter has recognized any given genre classification. But, if genre determines meaning, then this scenario is impossible. The interpreter must know the genre before he knows the text. But this is tantamount to imposing genre expectations upon the text."[55] In hermeneutics, we label this as eisegesis!

In the light of this, the ICBI statement on genre is taken out of context by the "new historiographical method." The ICBI statement reads: "We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, *taking account of its literary forms and devices*, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture" (Article XVIII, emphasis added). This does not mean that genre types derived from outside of Scripture should be used to determine the meaning of Scripture. For the preceding phrase states clearly that very next sentence stresses that it is "**the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis**" and the following sentence insists that **"Scripture is to interpret Scripture**" (emphasis added). Then it goes on to excluded extra-biblical sources used to determine the meaning of Scripture, proclaiming that: "We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, **dehistoricizing,** or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship" (emphasis added). But this is precisely what Mike Licona and the NA do in proclaiming that certain NT Gospel texts were (or could be) legends.[56]

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[53] Thomas Howe, "Does Genre Determine Meaning?," 10-11.
[54] Ibid., 6.
[55] Ibid., 10-11.
[56] Licona, *Resurrection.,* 34, 306, 548, 552-53.

We need to underscore the fact that the literary genres perceived in biblical as well as classical literature are for the most part generalizations created by scholars over the last few centuries. It is highly unlikely that the human authors of the Bible selected a particular genre for a specific passage and then made sure that they abided by the requirements mandated for the genre of their choice. It is true that some forms of literature are written according to some stated set of rules. However, the genres of literature frequently invoked for various Bible passages have no rules, only the criteria used by scholars to categorize them. They may be valid generalizations, but one cannot use them as sufficiently invariable to draw inferences from them.

For example, it is almost universally accepted the Old Testament contains a genre called "poetry," and it is an easy to move from there to the conclusion that poetry consists of figures of speech, thereby possibly weakening the factual meaning of a passage. However, in contrast to other languages and cultures, Hebrew "poetry" is highly ambiguous as a literary genre. For the last few centuries textbooks have generally stated that Hebrew poetry manifests itself in parallelism. However, this idea did not become popular until 1754 with the publication of the book *Praelectiones Academiae de Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (On the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews) by Robert Lowth. Subsequent scholars have expanded on the nature of parallelism to the point where it has practically lost its meaning because there remain few verses that would not fit one of the alleged types of parallelism. For example, E. W. Bullinger, lists seven types of parallelism.[57] But there still are problems with this classification. The criteria are not sufficient to reach agreement which passages exhibit parallelism (cf. e.g. Isaiah 37:30, which is translated as poetry in only some English versions). On the other hand, numerous texts exhibiting parallelism (e.g. Lamech's nasty outburst in Genesis 4:23-24) do not seem to fit our intuitive understanding of "poetry." We certainly cannot infer from the presence of parallelism that a passage must also contain figures of speech or symbolism. This much is certain: To classify a text as "poetry" on the basis of parallelism, and then to use that classification as a reason to deny its facticity is to go way beyond what can be gleaned from either our reconstructions of the genre or of the content of the Bible.[58]

Similarly, the genre of apocalyptic writing is a general category created inductively by scholars, and, thus, should not be used deductively to infer certain

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[57] E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (London: Eyres & Spottiswoode, 1898), p. 350.

[58] We are indebted to Professor Win Corduan for the points made in this and the following paragraph. See: Licona, 143; Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

features of a text. The name is based on the book of Revelation, the Apocalypse. Thus apocalyptic writing is literature in the style of the book of Revelation. Isaiah 24—27 is alleged to be an early example of it, and Daniel supposedly brought the style to maturity. It is also found in apocryphal books such as Enoch, 2 Esdras, and the Assumption of Moses. Once one takes a close look at all of these books and passages, it becomes clear that not one of them meets all of the criteria usually ascribed to apocalypticism. For example, not all look to the immediate future for redemption, not all are pseudepigraphal, not all depict a redeemer figure, not all are written in a time of despair, not all contain angels, and so forth. One cannot deny that there are similarities in style among the aforementioned texts, and it is legitimate to summarize those similarities for the sake of convenience with the term "apocalyptic style," as long as we keep in mind its Protean nature. Having labeled a passage as "apocalyptic," it would be a serious mistake on that basis to deduce anything about the passage that is not directly contained in it.

The discovery of genres continues, as we see with the references to "bioi" of late. Doing so may be helpful in understanding specific pieces of writing, including Bible passages. However genre criticism should never strait-jacket any particular passage, biblical or otherwise, in order to make it fit into the scholar's inductively derived category. Logically, to use genre criticism to as a tool to question the historicity of a passage is to commit the fallacy of begging the question. The same scholar who raises historical doubts on the basis of the genre of a passage categorized the passage as belonging to that genre to begin with.

The Presumption of Historicity

The traditional method of historical-grammatical analysis demanded by ICBI as part of its inerrancy statement (Article XVIII), presumes that a narrative text is historical. The new historiographical approach does not.[59] According to Licona, we approach the Gospel narratives in neutral with regard to their historicity. That is, we do not know in advance what the writer   intended to say in this narrative regarding its historicity.[60] We can only determine this after we have decided the genre categories outside the Gospels. Thus, when we look at the Gospels, they seem to fit best into the Greco-Roman biography category (which allows for legend and errors), then we can determine what is history and what is legend.[61]

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[59] http://commonsenseatheism.com/?p=261.

[60] Licona, *Resurrection,* 97-99.

[61] Ibid., 34, 306, 552-53.

However, this is contrary to the traditional historical-grammatical method which presumes that a narrative is historical, until proven otherwise. As the ICBI framers put it, "We deny that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which **present themselves as factual**." Then it goes on to affirm that it is wrong to take such texts and pronounce them a myth or allegory, noting, that "Some, for instance, take Adam to be a myth, whereas in **Scripture he is presented as a real person.** Others take Jonah to be an allegory **when he is presented as a historical person** and [is] so referred to by Christ" (EH Article XIII, emphasis added). As a member of the drafting committee, I [Norman Geisler] can verify that we explicitly had in mind also Robert Gundry (who was later let go from the ETS over this issue) when he denied the historicity of certain sections of Matthew on similar grounds to those used by Mike Licona.[62]

But just how does the TA justify its presumption of historicity in a narrative or how do we determine that they "present themselves as factual"? The answer lies in the nature of the historical-grammatical method. It is often called the "literal method" of interpretation, though appropriate qualifications (such as that it does not exclude figures of speech, etc.) are taken into account. The Latin title is s*ensus literalis*.[63] The basic or true sense of any statement is the literal sense. As it has been put popularly, "If the literal sense makes good sense, then seek no other sense, lest it result in nonsense." But from where do we get this presumption of literalness? The answer is: from the very nature of communication itself—of which language is the medium. The fact is, that communication is not possible without the assumption of literalness. Indeed, life itself as we know it would not be possible without this presumption. Consider for a moment, whether life would be possible if we did not presume that traffic signs convey literal meaning. The same is true of everything from labels on food and common conversations to courtroom procedures. Of course, figures of speech and symbols are used in literal communication, but the truth that is communicated is a literal truth. A figure of speech without an underlying literal core of meaning that is shared by those engaged in communication cannot convey any meaning.[64] For instance, Jesus said Lazarus was "sleeping" when he was actually dead (Jn. 11:11-14). This is an appropriate figure of speech of a

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[62] http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/09/14/the-devil-is-in-the-details-biblical-inerrancy-and-the-licona-controversy/.

[63] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Single Meaning, Unified Referents," in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.

[64] See Paul Edwards, "Professor Tillich's Confusions" *Mind* 94 (April 1965):197-206, for a good exposition on the futility of "irreducible metaphors."

literal event—death. However, this is significantly different from the claim that death is not a literal event of which we can use appropriate figures of speech or symbols.

Now the basis for taking things literally in common communication applies not only to the present but also to the past. When statements are made about the past, we assume them to refer to literal events, unless there is good reason to think otherwise by the biblical text, its context, or other biblical texts. So, the **historical**-grammatical method by its very name and nature has the presumption of historicity when used of the past. So, when the Gospel narrative declares that Jesus rose from the dead (Mt. 27:53), then we presume this is historical. Likewise, when the same chapter (Mt. 27:50-54) says that some saints were resurrected "after his [Jesus'] resurrection," then we presume (unless proven to the contrary by biblical context), that this statement is referring to a literal resurrection as well. Thus, the burden of proof rests on those who "dehistoricize" this or any like narrative. Further, once we examine the text, its context, and other biblical text, we see: (a) there is no evidence in the text to the contrary, and (b) there is strong evidence in the text and context that the presumption of historicity is justified.[65]

Indeed, there are multiple lines of evidence to confirm the historicity of the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27, including the following:[66] (1) This passage is a part of a historical narrative in a historical record—the Gospel of Matthew. Both the specific context (the crucifixion and resurrection narrative) and the larger setting (the Gospel of Matthew) demand the presumption of historicity, unless there is strong evidence to the contrary in the text, its context, or in other Scripture—which there is not. (2) This text manifests no literary signs of being poetic or legendary, such as those found in parables, poems, or symbolic presentations. Hence, it should be taken in the sense in which it presents itself, namely, as factual history. (3) This passage gives no indication of being a legendary embellishment, but it is a short, simple, straight-forward account in the exact style one expects in a brief historical narrative. (4) This event occurs in the context of other important historical events—the death and

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[65] See J. W. Wenhem, "When Were the Saints Raised, A Note on the Punctuation of Matthew Matt. 27:51-53," *JTS* 32/1 (April 1981) 150-152.

[66] See JETS latest article reviewing Licona's book: Charles L. Quarles, "Review: *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*." By Michael R. Licona. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010, 718 pp., *JETS* 54/4 (December 2011) 839-844.

resurrection of Christ—and there is no indication that it is an insertion foreign to the text. To the contrary, the repeated use of "and" shows its integral connection to the other historical events surrounding the report. (5) The resurrection of these saints is presented as the *result* of the physical historical resurrection of Christ. For these saints were resurrected only "after" Jesus was resurrected and as a result of it (Matt 27:53) since Jesus is the "firstfruits" of the dead (1Cor 15:20). It makes no sense to claim that a legend emerged as the immediate result of Jesus' physical resurrection. Nor would it have been helpful to the cause of early Christians in defending the literal resurrection of Christ for them to incorporate legends, myths, or apocalyptic events alongside His actual resurrection in the inspired text of Scripture.

In addition to this indication with the text, there are other reason for accepting the historicity of Matthew 27: (6) Early Fathers of the Christian Church, who were closer to this event, took it as historical, sometimes even including it as an apologetic argument for the resurrection of Christ (e.g., Irenaeus, *Fragments,* XXVIII; Origen, *Against Celsus*, Book II, Article XXXIII; Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, Chap. XIII). (7) The record has the same pattern as the historical records of Jesus' physical and historical resurrection: (a) there were dead bodies; (b) they were buried in a tomb; (c) they were raised to life again; (d) they came out of the tomb and left it empty; (e) they appeared to many witnesses. (8) An overwhelming consensus of the great orthodox teachers of the Church for the past nearly two thousand years supports the view that this account should be read as a historical record, and, consequently, as reporting historical truth. Aquinas cited the Fathers with approval, saying, "It was a great thing to raise Lazarus after four days, much more was it that they who had long slept should now shew themselves alive; this is indeed a proof of the resurrection to come" (Chrysostom). And "As Lazarus rose from the dead, so also did many bodies of the saints rise again to shew forth the Lord's resurrection" (Jerome).[67] (9) Modern objections to a straight-forward acceptance of this passage as a true historical narrative are based on a faulty hermeneutic, violating sound principles of interpretation. For example, they (a) make a presumptive identification of its genre, based on extra-biblical sources, rather than analyzing the text for its style, grammar, and content in its context; or, (b) they use events reported outside of the Bible to pass judgment on whether or not the biblical event is historical. (10) The faulty hermeneutic principles used in point #9 could be used, without any further justification, to deny other events in the gospels as historical. Since there is no hermeneutical criterion of "magnitude," the same principles could also be used to

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[67] Thomas Aquinas, *The Gospel of Matthew XXVII* in *Catena Aurea* (*Commentary on the Four Gospels. Vol. I: St. Matthew,* Part III), 964.

relegate events such as the Virgin Birth or the Resurrection of Christ to the realm of legend.

ICBI on Dehistoricizing the Gospel Record

Since there is both the presumptive confirmation of historicity in the Gospel narrative and abundant evidence in the text itself and early understandings of it, then it is understandable that *The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy* would speak to the contemporary trend to undermine the inerrancy of the Gospel record, such as, has once again been attempted by Mike Licona. In the process of defending the historicity of the resurrection of Christ he undermined the historicity of the very Gospel narrative which supports the historicity of the resurrection. This led Southern Baptist leader Dr. Al Mohler to declare: "Licona has not only **violated the inerrancy of Scripture**, but he has **blown a massive hole into his own masterful defense of the resurrection."** Thus, "**Licona has handed the enemies of the resurrection of Jesus Christ a powerful weapon…."** (emphasis added).[68]

The ICBI framers condemned what some evangelical scholars were doing in undermining the Gospel record and provided clear statements that condemn that kind of "dehistoricizing." They wrote: "We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship" (Article XVIII). And in the official ICBI commentary on their inerrancy statement, they added, "It has been fashionable in certain quarters to maintain that the Bible is not normal history, but redemptive history with an accent on redemption. Theories have been established that would limit inspiration to the redemptive theme of redemptive history, allowing the historical dimension of redemptive history to be errant" (Sproul, EI, 36). "Though the Bible is indeed *redemptive* history, it is also redemptive *history*, and this means that the acts of salvation wrought by God actually occurred in the space-time world" (Sproul, EI, 37). In addition, ICBI unequivocally stated that "We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science" (Article XII).

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[68] http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/09/14/the-devil-is-in-the-details-biblical-inerrancy-and-the-licona-controversy/.

In addition to the ICBI statements (above) declaring that dehistoricizing the Gospels is a denial of inerrancy, there are several other reasons in support of our conclusion: (1) Affirming the historical truth of this text in Matthew 27 has been the overwhelming consensus of the great orthodox teachers of the Christian Church for the past nearly 2000 years. So, any denial of its historicity has virtually the whole weight of Christian history against it. (2) The largest organization of scholars in the world who affirm inerrancy, *The Evangelical Theological Society* (ETS), declared that views like this that dehistoricize the Gospel record are incompatible with inerrancy, and, hence, they asked a member (Robert Gundry) to resign by an overwhelming vote (in 1983) because he had denied the historicity of sections in Matthew. The only real difference to Licona's approach in Matthew 27 is the type of extra-biblical literature used—apocalyptic vs. midrash. (3) The official statements of the ICBI, the largest group of international scholars to formulate an extended statement on inerrancy, explicitly exclude views like this that "dehistoricize" Gospel narratives. As a member of the ICBI drafting committee, I [Norman Geisler] know for certain that views like Robert Gundry's were a specific target when we declared: "We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching…" ("Chicago Statement on Inerrancy," Article XVIII), and "We deny that generic categories which negate historicity may rightfully be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual" (*Statement on Hermeneutics*, Article XIII). (4) The ETS has adopted the ICBI understanding of inerrancy as their guide in determining its meaning. And the ETS excluded a member who dehistoricized sections of the Gospel like this. And it was because of instances like this, where members redefine doctrinal statements to suit their own beliefs, that the International Society of Christian Apologetics (www.isca–apologetics.org) added this sentence: "This doctrine is understood as the one expressed by the Framers of the *International Council on Biblical Inerrancy* in its 'Chicago Statement' and as interpreted by the official ICBI Commentary on it." (5) Neither the ETS nor ICBI, in their official statements and actions, have allowed divorcing hermeneutics from inerrancy by making the vacuous claim that one could hold to inerrancy regardless of the hermeneutical method he employed and the conclusions to which it leads, even if it dehistoricized the creation story, the death of Christ, or His resurrection. If they did, then they would no longer be an "Evangelical" theological society. (6) Statements from other ICBI framers and members confirm this relationship between hermeneutics and inerrancy. An ICBI framer and founder of the ICBI, RC Sproul wrote:

Inspiration without inerrancy is an empty term. Inerrancy without inspiration is unthinkable. The two are inseparably related. They may be distinguished

but not separated. So it is with hermeneutics. We can easily distinguish between the inspiration and interpretation of the Bible, but we cannot separate them. Anyone can confess a high view of the nature of Scripture but the ultimate test of one's view of Scripture is found in his method of interpreting it. A person's hermeneutic reveals his view of Scripture more clearly than does an exposition of his view.[69]

In his book *Does Inerrancy Matter?* James Montgomery Boice cites John Feinberg stating: "Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their *original autographs* and *properly interpreted* will be shown to be wholly true in everything they teach, whether that teaching has to do with doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, or other disciplines of knowledge."[70]

Dehistoricizing the Gospel Record is a Denial of Inerrancy

Licona and his defenders attempt to argue that the historicity of the Gospels is not a matter of inspiration (or inerrancy), but a matter of interpretation. But this move is unsuccessful for many reasons.

First, it is built on a serious misunderstanding about what inerrancy means, especially that of the ICBI, which Licona claims to support. The ICBI statements insist that the Bible does make true statements that "correspond to reality" and that the Bible is completely true (corresponds to reality) in everything it teaches and "touches," including all statements "about history and science." So, inerrancy does not simply apply to contentless statements (for which we can only know the meaning by adopting a modern form of biblical criticism). Rather, inerrancy as a doctrine covers the truthfulness of all that Scripture teaches, including its own inerrancy.

Second, without a connection between inerrancy and hermeneutics—the literal historical-grammatical hermeneutics—the claim of inerrancy would be totally empty or vacuous. It would amount to saying, "**If** the Bible makes any truth claim, then it is true, but inerrancy *per se* does not entail that the Bible makes any truth claim." But inerrancy is not an empty vacuous claim. It is a claim that the whole Bible makes truth-claims, and that it is true in all that it

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[69] R. C. Sproul, "Biblical Interpretation and the Analogy of Faith," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*. Eds. Roger R. Nicole & J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 134.

[70] James Montgomery Boice, *Does Inerrancy Matter?* (Oakland: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1977), 13, emphasis added.

affirms. And truth, as we have seen and as it is defined by ICBI, is what corresponds to reality. So, to affirm the Bible as completely true is to affirm that all it affirms about reality is actually true. Thus, when it affirms things about the past, it follows that they are historically true. This means that to deny their inerrancy is to deny their historicity. The ICBI statements are very clear on this matter. They emphatically declare that: "HOLY SCRIPTURE, BEING GOD'S OWN WORD, WRITTEN BY MEN PREPARED AND SUPERINTENDED BY HIS SPIRIT, IS OF INFALLIBLE DIVINE AUTHORITY **IN ALL MATTERS UPON WHICH IT TOUCHES** ("A SHORT STATEMENT, "NO. 2, EMPHASIS ADDED) "We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture" (ARTICLE XIII). "We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write" (ARTICLE IX). "We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science" (ARTICLE XII). "We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture" (ARTICLE XIII). So, inerrancy is not an empty claim. It claims that every affirmation (or denial) in the Bible is completely true, whether it is about theological, scientific or historical matters (emphasis added in above quotations).

Third, a complete disjunction between hermeneutics and inerrancy is an example of "Methodological Unorthodoxy" which we first exposed in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (JETS) in 1983, now easily accessible on our web site (www.normangeisler.net). (1) If Licona's total separation of inerrancy and hermeneutic is true, then one could completely allegorize the Bible (say, like Mary Baker Eddy did)—denying the literal Virgin Birth, physical resurrection of Christ, and everything else—and still claim that they held to the inerrancy of the Bible. (2) Such a bifurcation of hermeneutics from inerrancy is empty, vacuous, and meaningless. It amounts to saying that the Bible is not teaching that anything is actually true. But neither the ETS nor ICBI, whose view of inerrancy was adopted as guidelines for understanding inerrancy, would agree with this contention, as the next point demonstrates.[71] [72]

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[71] Support for this conclusion comes from retired Wheaton Professor and ICBI signer Henri Blocher who speaks against totally separating interpretation from the inerrancy issue because "It is thus possible to talk of Scripture's supreme authority, perfect trustworthiness, infallibility and inerrancy and to empty such talk of the full and exact meaning it should retain by the way one handles the text." He adds, "I reject the suggestion that Matthew 27:52f should be read nonliterally, and I consider that it puts in

Fourth, the ICBI Chicago Statement on inerrancy includes a statement on the literal historical-grammatical hermeneutics. Article XVIII reads: "We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis…." There are very good reasons for including this statement on hermeneutics in an evangelical inerrancy statement. For one thing, there would be no doctrine of inerrancy were it not for the historical-grammatical hermeneutic by which we derive inerrancy from Scripture. For another, the term "evangelical" implies a certain confessional standard on essential doctrines, including the inspiration of Scripture, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, His atoning death, and his bodily resurrection. These doctrines expressed in the early Creeds of Christendom are

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jeopardy the affirmation of biblical inerrancy which I resolutely uphold." Blocher advocates a literal interpretation of the passage because the last words of verse 53 "sound as an emphatic claim of historical, factual, truthfulness with an intention akin to that of 1 Corinthians 15:6." So, a nonliteral interpretation "seems rather to be motivated by the difficulty of believing the thing told and by an unconscious desire to conform to the critical views of non-evangelical scholarship." He correctly notes that the pressure of non-evangelical scholarship weighs heavily on the work of evangelical scholars. Thus, the non-literal interpretation is not only an exegetical mistake, but "In effect, it modifies the way in which biblical inerrancy is affirmed. Contrary to the intention of those propounding it, it undermines the meaning of 'inerrancy' which we should, with utmost vigilance, preserve" Erin Roach, "Licona Appeals to J. I. Packer's Approach" (*Baptist Press*, Nov. 9, 2011), n.p.

[72] Packer argued against Licona like positions in *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* pg 166-68 claiming: "Faith is rooted in the realization that the gospel is God's word; and faith recognizes in its divine origin a full and sufficient guarantee of its veracity. So with Scripture, 'God's Word written': faith rests its confidence in the truth of the biblical narratives, not on the critical acumen of the historian, but on the unfailing trustworthiness of God."

In footnote 3 at the end of the paragraph on page 167 JI Packer states: "It should perhaps be emphasized that we do not mean by this that Scripture history is written according to the canons of modern scientific history. Biblical historians are not concerned to answer all the questions which modern historians ask, nor to tell their story with the detailed completeness to which the modern researcher aspires. It is no more possible to write a full history of Israel from the Old Testament documents than to write a complete biography of Christ from the four Gospels, or a full record of the expansion of Christianity during its first thirty years from Acts. The biblical writers had their own aims and interests guiding their selection of the evidence, and their own conventions for using it; and if we fail to take account of these things in interpreting what they wrote, we violate the canon of literal interpretation: cf. pp. 102 ff. above. Our point in the text is simply that, when Scripture professes to narrate fact, faith receives the narrative as factual on God's authority, and does not conclude it to be legendary, or mythical, or mystical, or mere human authority."

derived from Scripture by the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. Without it there would be no "evangelical" or "orthodox" creeds of beliefs in accord with them.[73]

Inerrancy is Actually Inseparable from Interpretation

Inerrancy and the literal hermeneutic are formally distinct, but they are actually inseparable. Failure to make this distinction has led some to the false conclusion that any time one changes his interpretation on a given passage of Scripture, he has thereby denied inerrancy since opposing interpretations cannot both be true. However, this is based on the false assumption that what is actually inseparable is identical. Siamese twins with two heads and only one heart are inseparable but not identical. Apart from death, our soul and body are inseparable, but they are not identical. Hence, the charge that inerrancy and hermeneutics are identical is absurd. ICBI did not suppose that inerrancy and hermeneutics were formally identical, only that they were actually inseparable. So, when one changes his interpretation from a false one to a true one, the truth of the Bible does not change. All that changes is his interpretation of that text. Truth does not change when our understanding of it changes. The Bible remains inerrant when our interpretations are not. In short, there is an overlap between inerrancy and hermeneutics because inerrancy is not an empty (vacuous) claim. It is a claim that involves the assertion that an inspired Bible is actually true in all that it affirms. And this truth corresponds literally to the reality about which it speaks. Thus, inerrancy is not claiming that "If the Bible is making a truth claim, then that truth claim must be true." Rather, inerrancy claims that that "The Bible is making truth claims, and they are all true." Since truth is what corresponds to reality, to say the Bible is inerrant is to say that all of its claims correspond to reality.[74]

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[73] See: *Four Views on The Spectrums of Evangelicalism*, eds. Stanley Gundrey, Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

[74] RC Sproul once said, "[T]he confession [of biblical inerrancy] rests its confidence on the integrity of God. On numerous occasions I have queried several Biblical and theological scholars in the following manner. –"Do you maintain the inerrancy of Scripture?" –"No"–"Do you believe the Bible to be inspired of God?"–"Yes"–"Do you think God inspires error?"–"No"–"Is all of the Bible inspired by God?"–"Yes"–"Is the Bible errant?"–"No"–"Is it inerrant?"–"No!"– At that point I usually acquire an Excedrin headache." See: John Warwick Montgomery, *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1974), 257.

Finally, to retreat to the unknown and *unexpressed* "intentions" of the author behind the text, as opposed to the *expressed intentions* in the text, can be little more than a cover for one's unorthodox beliefs. This assumption that we do not know the author's intentions expressed in the biblical text, but must seek to find them by some extra-biblical text, is a capitulation to contemporary scholarship rather than submission to the ancient Lordship of the Savior who affirmed the imperishability (Mt. 5:17-18), final authority (Mt. 15:1-6), unbreakability (John 10:35), and inerrancy of Scripture (Mt. 22: 29; Jn. 17:17).

Conclusion

There are unorthodox methods and unorthodox messages. Unorthodox methodology leads to unorthodox theology. Many NT scholars,[75] including Mike Licona, have done both. In the final analysis that *with which* we think can be just as important, if not more, than that *about which* we think. As we have seen, The "New Histriographical Approach" of Mike Licona is an unorthodox methodology. And this unorthodox method led him to some unorthodox conclusions.

The tendency to migrate toward what is new is a dangerous tendency in contemporary biblical scholarship. It is based on a fallacious premise that claims, to use popular language, that "new is true" and implies "old is mold." I [Norman Geisler] for one have found after 60 years of biblical studies that "Old is gold." And I would urge that young evangelical scholars resist the Athenian tendency to "spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:21).

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[75] See Geisler and Roach, "Part Two: Recent Challenges to Inerrancy," *Defending Inerrancy*, 45-211.

The Disbelieving Michael Shermer: A Review Essay of Michael Shermer's *The Believing Brain*

Eugene A. Curry[1]

Michael Shermer. *The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies: How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths*. New York: Times Books, 2011. ISBN-13: 978-0805091250 (hardcover). 400 pages. $28.00

Introduction

Michael Shermer is an interesting man. He is a former professional cyclist, a professor at Claremont Graduate University in California, and the Executive Director of the Skeptics Society. It is in this last role as a professional unbeliever that Shermer has really made a name for himself. Raised within a household largely apathetic to religious issues, Shermer embraced Christianity as a teenager and pursued his new spirituality with gusto. But after some time Shermer's faith began to wane and ultimately guttered out. Now, armed with an education in experimental psychology and history, Shermer opposes belief in all things supernatural and paranormal by writing books on these issues, publishing a magazine entitled *Skeptic*, debating prominent believers, and standing in as the designated doubter in various media appearances.

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Shermer's latest book, *The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies—How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths*, pursues this very track, sketching out the various dynamics that undergird human thought and then analyzing a range of beliefs he finds incredible with reference to that theoretical framework. Unsurprisingly, given Shermer's own religious skepticism, he dedicates a fairly sizable chunk of his book to debunking religious notions like life after death and the existence of God.

It is in connection with this material, then, that this essay will evaluate Shermer's book and the reasoning that he employs. Specifically, this review will concern itself with a few major topics that have a bearing (some more, some less) on religion: (1) Shermer's views regarding human minds, (2) Shermer's treatment of belief in the afterlife (and religion generally), and (3) Shermer's handling of the existence of God. There is also the matter of Shermer's deep indebtedness to a field called "evolutionary psychology", and, since it undergirds his thought throughout, I shall address that topic as well, numbering it as issue (0), to indicate its fundamental position in Shermer's thinking.

Before getting into these highly-contestable topics though, it bears stating that at least some of the more general theses of Shermer's book seem fairly uncontroversial: (A) People naturally look for patterns and therefore find them when they exist and (sometimes) even when they do not—what Shermer calls "patternicity"; (B) People are prone to identify agency—both when it is real and (sometimes) even when it is just imagined—what Shermer calls "agenticity"; and (C) Once people have a certain belief in their heads they can and will seek to reinforce that idea with unconsciously biased thinking. These ideas fall under the rubric of psychology—Shermer's area of education and expertise—and they seem fairly well established experimentally.

His other point, (D), that "beliefs come first; reasons for beliefs follow,"[2] is more dubious. Certainly this *sometimes* happens, especially when the beliefs in question are relatively ideological in nature. But this little maxim simply cannot be taken as a universal law of human thought. I have the belief that I am looking at a laptop computer at this very moment as I write this review. Am I just choosing to believe this observation as a matter of blind faith, with reasons only being sought after the fact to rationalize my choice? Of course not; I have sensory data to this effect and mental referents that my mind accesses so quickly that my belief is automatically and rightly motivated by credible reasons. So if Shermer intends (D) to be merely an asterisk affixed to human thought as a little

2.   Michael Shermer, Believing Brain, 133.

reminder of the pitfalls people can sometimes face, that is fine. If he intends it as a universal explanation of all thought, however, then he is wrong.[3]

We now turn to the focal issues, which I have numbered 0 through 3.

(0) Shermer's Indebtedness to Evolutionary Psychology

Shermer builds much of his skepticism on evolutionary psychology. His whole theory of the mind is ultimately grounded in this conceptual soil, and it affects his thinking regarding belief in an afterlife and God as well. It is not surprising then that Shermer has a very high opinion of the field: Shermer calls it a "full-fledged science."[4] He claims that "Evolutionary psychologists… have demonstrated unequivocally … [this or that phenomenon.]"[5] And he states that there is "a body of uncontestable evidence" for the evolutionary origins of certain human behavior.[6]

These are serious-sounding claims. And coming from someone with Michael Shermer's credentials one might be inclined to take them seriously. Unfortunately for Dr. Shermer, however, those who specialize in evolutionary theory—actual biologists, for example—are not nearly so keen about evolutionary psychology.

Take Jerry Coyne, a thorough-going evolutionary biologist at the University of Chicago and certainly no friend of religion; he has echoed the sentiments of many others in his field by stating that evolutionary psychology "is not science, but advocacy" and that its promoters are "guilty of indifference to scientific standards. They buttress strong claims with weak reasoning, weak data, and finagled statistics… [and] choose ideology over knowledge." Further, in Coyne's

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3.   Shermer is also rather fond of applying this maxim to his ideological opponents while only rarely applying it to himself. For example, compare Shermer's statements about Francis Collin's conversion to Christianity on﹐ 31-36 against his statements concerning his own conversion to atheism on﹐ 43-45. Collins's change of mind was facilitated by an "emotional trigger;" Shermer's reorientation was facilitated initially by an "intellectual consideration."
4.   Ibid., 42.
5.   Ibid., 48.
6.   Ibid., 73.

view, evolutionary psychologists "deal in dogmas rather than propositions of science."[7]

Massimo Pigliucci, the celebrated geneticist and philosopher (and another atheist) concurs with Coyne, writing in the context of a chapter entitled, "Is Evolutionary Psychology Pseudo-Science?" that evolutionary psychology's fundamental problem with testability "certainly moves it away from mainstream evolutionary biology and into territory uncomfortably close to purely historical research" because "Empirical testing… is one major characteristic distinguishing science from nonscience. Although something might sound 'scientific,' such as in the case of string theory in physics or the borderline examples of evolutionary psychology… a field does not belong to science unless there are reasonable ways to test its theories against data."[8]

Similarly, Dan Agin (a molecular geneticist) has stated that "There's much in evolutionary psychology that's not pseudoscience, but unfortunately there's enough to be worrisome."[9]

One finds precisely these untestable "borderline examples" which constitute just so much pseudoscience throughout Shermer's book. Perhaps the most glaring is the claim that people's willingness to wear television's Mr. Rogers' iconic cardigan sweater is to be explained in connection with phallic bananas and contagious diseases.[10]

That Shermer would enthusiastically embrace this sort of fantasy as a "full-fledged science" is made all the more surprising given that he approvingly cites another researcher in the midst of this very section to the effect that, if something is "not substantiated by a body of reliable evidence", it is therefore "supernatural and unscientific."[11]

To be fair, it is not that all of Shermer's evolutionary psychology is necessarily bunk. (The idea that humans evolved to recognize faces swiftly seems plausible enough given the data in hand and his methodology.[12]) It is merely

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7.   Quoted in *Evolution's Rainbow*, by Joan Roughgarden (University of California Press: 2004), 174.
8.   Massimo Pigliucci, *Nonsense of Stilts* (University of Chicago Press: 2010), 304, 45.
9.   Dan Agin, *More Than Genes* (University of Oxford Press: 2010), 303.
10. Shermer, 88-89.
11. Ibid., 88.
12. Ibid., 69-72.

Shermer's emphatic confidence that most or even *all* human beliefs and actions can be explained in this fashion—and with a scientific degree of certainty at that—which makes it highly dubious.

Indeed, it is precisely this willingness on Shermer's part to explain *all* belief with recourse to Darwinian pressures that begins to get him into trouble with religious/metaphysical problems. After all, on Shermer's view, "'the evolutionary rationale for superstition is clear: natural selection will favor strategies that make many incorrect causal associations in order to establish those that are essential for survival and reproduction.' In other words, we tend to find meaningful patterns whether they are there or not… In this sense patternicites such as superstition and magical thinking are… natural processes of a learning brain."[13]

Given this view, though, what confidence can Shermer have that his own cherished beliefs such as the reliability of inductive reasoning and the scientific method are not just "superstition and magical thinking"? He might appeal to an inductive proof—that induction is probably reliable because of X, Y, and Z—but such a proof would be circular since, as a form of inductive reasoning, it presupposes the reliability of the very thing that is being questioned here. It would seem that Shermer has thus hurled himself into the teeth of Alvin Plantinga's "Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism."[14]

More broadly, Shermer's enthusiastic willingness to call non-science "science" gives one reason to think that he is playing with loaded dice. Later in the book he will oppose popular religious and near-religious claims with reference to evolutionary psychology (e.g. visions, near death experiences, etc.). But rather than say honestly, "Here is one non-scientific view and here is my view that competes with it—and it is also more of a guess than strict science," he will set up the conflict as if it is between some folk belief and the established deliverances of modern science. This sort of thing smacks of emotional manipulation, intentionally keying into the reverence that many people have for hard science even where it is not applicable. It is essentially an attempt to

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13. Ibid., 62.
14. Alvin Plantinga, "Methodological Naturalism Part 2" in "Philosophical Analysis Origins & Design" 18:2 available at
    http://www.arn.org/docs/odesign/od182/methnat182.htm.

intimidate the opposition (or reassure his partisans) in a slightly mendacious way.[15]

Given that much of Shermer's confident rejection of this or that supernatural or religious claim in the book is predicated on his less-than-fully-scientific evolutionary psychology, a reader would do well to take such confident denials with a very large grain of salt.

(1) Shermer's Theory of Mind

Shermer has a somewhat slippery theory of mind. Given that he proudly declares himself to be a materialist,[16] it is not entirely surprising that he makes statements that are at least indicative of a hardcore materialistic reductionism and which sometimes give a glimpse of an even harder-core eliminativism.[17] But then, after seeming to deny the very existence of things like awareness, beliefs, desires, and intentions,[18] he turns around and tells his readers that humans evolved the capacity to "be aware of such mental states as desires and intentions in both ourselves and others."[19]

Also, while Shermer sometimes denies the very existence of minds "in" human beings and repudiates all of the "mentalistic" terminology that goes along with them, he is quite willing to use that very terminology to describe the actions of even single-celled organisms: "E. coli… *formed meaningful associations* between stimuli (visual, taste) and their effects (dangerous, poisonous)." And *E.*

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15. This strategy recalls a parody of arguments against God written up by a Christian philosopher named Glenn Peoples: "When it comes to God and morality… the Catholic Church molests children. Are you defending that? And in conclusion, the Crusades. And science." Glenn Peoples, comment on "Debate Review: William Lane Craig and Sam Harris," Say Hello to My Little Friend, comment posted April 12, 2011, http://www.beretta-online.com/wordpress/2011/debate-review-william-lane-craig-and-sam-harris/ (accessed February 24, 2012).

16. Shermer, 22 .

17. E.g. "[M]y current belief [is] that there is no such thing as 'mind,' and that all mental processes can be explained only by understanding the underlying neural correlates of behavior." Ibid., 41 and "We now have a fairly sound understanding of the machinery [of the brain], thereby rendering the theater of the mind an illusion. There is no theater, and no agent sitting inside the theater watching the world go by on the screen." Ibid., 130

18. Ibid., 130.

19. Ibid., 87.

coli swim "toward the taste of a substance chemically similar to aspartate because of its original *preference* for the real thing."[20] (emphasis added)

This contradiction is made all the more incoherent by Shermer's openness to the notion of "emergence"—the coming into being of meaningfully distinct levels of reality at certain thresholds of size, complexity, or some other quality.[21] He cites emergence when he scolds those who would seek to reduce the mind to mere atomic physics. But then, on what grounds can he avoid being scolded himself for trying to reduce the mind to mere cellular biology? After all, if minds are just brains, and brains are just neuronal cells, and cells are just atoms, why is an atomic reductionism out of line but neuronal reductionism right on the money? If one such reductionism can be rebuffed on the basis of emergence, surely all such reductionisms can be rebuffed on the same basis: just as genuine stability emerges from quantum instability when one moves from atoms to cells, so (plausibly) genuine mentalistic phenomena can also emerge from physicalistic phenomena when one moves from cells to minds. But if that is the case then all of Shermer's confident declarations concerning neural determinism and how human free-will is an illusion are merely category errors.[22]

Indeed, once Shermer invokes emergence it would seem that all bets are off and that all of his reductionistic materialism suddenly finds itself only telling part (and that perhaps the less interesting part) of the story of the natural world. Perhaps at a certain threshold of mental reality entirely new levels of awareness emerge that connect one to transcendent conceptual domains—offering one at least possible ways of imagining veridical awareness of moral truth, mathematical certainties, and spirituality—even from within Shermer's purely materialistic anthropology.

That is not to say that such a thing is *certainly* happening, not even that it is *probably* happening. It is only to say that it is just *possible* that it might be happening. But even that is enough to seriously undermine one of Shermer's arguments that will come to the fore a bit later in connection with religion: that "it is *not possible* for a natural finite being to know a super-natural infinite being."[23] (emphasis added)

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20. Ibid., 74.
21. Ibid., 151. For a fuller treatment of emergence in the natural world see the diagram in Arthur Peacocke's Theology for a Scientific Age (Fortress: 1993), 217.
22. Shermer, 72.
23. Ibid., 177.

Shermer goes so far as to say that his position on the chasm between the finite and the infinite is true "by definition." But the phrase "by definition" is a bit of rhetorical overreach on Shermer's part; what he should say is that it is true because of 1) the "essential nature" of humanity according to his preferred reductive materialistic anthropology, and 2) the nature of God according to conventional theism. He claims that the human mind is strictly finite and can only formulate finite concepts based on input from finite physical senses observing the finite physical world and then processing such data through a finite physical brain. And since God is supposed to be infinite and exist "outside" the physical world, then a God could only exist outside of our sensual and conceptual net, and would, thus, be unknowable.[24]

This argument is already pretty shaky from an empirical point of view, given that mathematicians pursuing set theory routinely analyze intangible, non-physical, infinite magnitudes. But Shermer's willingness to embrace the notion of emergence—that the whole might not be just *greater than* the sum of the part but *categorically different from* the sum of its parts—invalidates the argument completely. Yes, God might not exist as a matter of fact, or God might exist but still be unknowable to humans as limited physical creatures, but no mere dogmatic appeals to reductive definitions or supposed essential natures can establish such conclusions at this point. Thus, to remain coherent, the only way to make progress is by evaluating the conclusions by giving the evidence a fair hearing.

And it is here that we encounter the overtly anti-religious presuppositions of Shermer's book.

(2) Shermer's Treatment of Belief in an Afterlife (and Religion Generally)

Shermer thinks he knows why people believe in an afterlife; he lays out the various factors that conspire to foist this idea on people in chapter seven: (A) "agenticity" as he defined it earlier, (B) the innate belief in anthropological dualism, (C) our "theory of mind" as he defines that phrase—which is our ability to think about minds other than our own, (D) mental "body schema", (E) our "left brain interpreter"—the story-telling module of the brain, and (F) our imagination.[25] In Shermer's entire presentation of these points, however, he never offers any actual arguments that would make his list anything more than mere

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24. Ibid., 185.
25. Ibid., 143-144.

assertions. It seems to be little more than an enumerated "just-so story." Now, we can recall Shermer's own maxim that beliefs come first and reasons for the beliefs are only sought later (a view reiterated in this very chapter).[26] Consequently, one could say that he is merely being consistent with his maxim insofar as he presents no arguments here *at all*. He could be seen as announcing his beliefs and postponing the disclosure of reasons for them for a later time, after he has sought for such reasons and found them. One could, then, infer that all he is offering as his own gut-level non-rational beliefs. That would be fine, but it is not convincing; indeed, it does not even seek to be convincing. Why should anyone accept such an unfounded claims?

Shermer does a much better job when he attempts to debunk the reasons that "believers" offer for why they believe in an afterlife. Here he notes a number of reasons given and then proceeds to offer arguments for why the reasons are inadequate. He states that "the case for the existence of the afterlife is built around four lines of evidence" and lists them as (A) information fields and the universal life force, (B) ESP and the evidence of mind, (C) quantum consciousness, and (D) near-death experiences.[27]

Looking over this list and the treatment that followed, though, one may be surprised to find that the reasons he lists have nothing to do with the classic case for an afterlife as propounded by the majority faith cluster of humanity: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—which are often called the Abrahamic faiths. None of these religions argue for the existence of an afterlife on the basis of "information fields" or ESP or quantum mechanics. And while near-death experiences are *sometimes* factored in, they are generally only a footnote to the more central reasons.

As for the actual reasons most informed "believers in the afterlife" (i.e. Christians, Muslims, and Jews) have given, they run as follows: (A) the essential faithfulness and loving nature of God,[28] (B) promises of the existence of an afterlife offered by an authoritative prophet of God in sacred scripture,[29] and, for Christians at least, (C) the down-payment on that promise found in Jesus' own

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26. Ibid., 145.

27. Ibid., 145 ff.

28. E.g. Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus* (T & T Clark: 2005) *,* 217-219; Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press: 2004) *,* 261-262; and John Polkinghorne, *The Faith of a Physicist* (Fortress Press: 1996) 122.

29. E.g. Daniel 12:1-3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16, Surah 75 (*al-Qiyamah*)

personal triumph over death through his resurrection into a renewed, physically embodied life in the course of known history.

That Shermer would just not address these issues *at all* in this context seems incredible, especially considering that most people who will read his book come out of a cultural background in which an Abrahamic faith predominates. Again, these reasons might be wrong, but if Shermer intends to address "the case for the existence of the afterlife" as put forward by believers in an afterlife, then presumably he should address the *actual* case put forward by most such believers. Indeed, given the focus of his arguments in this section, it therefore seems that when Shermer speaks of "believers in the afterlife," what he really means is a small minority within that larger group composed mostly of New Agers and the occasional secular humanist, such as John Beloff.

So why this strange oversight? The reason is straight-forward and beyond debate, even though it might be deemed unkind by his followers: Dr. Shermer is not equipped to entertain knowledgeable discussions in theology or philosophy. When he makes such an attempt, he ventures not only far outside of his area of expertise, but even out of his competence. He is navigating in personally unfamiliar waters, and he has admitted as much.[30]

Dr. Shermer was recently on the White Horse Inn radio show and in that context he discussed his time in college and his decision to move away from studying religion to focus instead on science. He said, "I was better in science than I was in philosophy and theology."[31]

A sympathetic listener could reasonably take such a statement, in such a context, as little more than a bit of good-natured and self-effacing humor: the

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30. Please note that this point does not constitute a commission of the *ad hominem* fallacy, which avoids the rational discussion of a conclusion by pointing instead at the person holding those convictions. The issue in question in this and the following paragraphs is not Dr. Shermer's conclusions, but how he could ever come up with such tangential and somewhat bizarre ideas. This inquiry leads to the further puzzle as to whether he is even qualified to draw rational conclusions on these issues. Thus, the man is at the center of the discussion, and it is not fallacious or inappropriate to evaluate the man's attributes in such a context.

31. "WHI-1050: An Interview with Skeptic Michael Shermer", Out of the Horse's Mouth: White Horse Inn Blog, audio file, 1:55, http://www.whitehorseinn.org/blog/2011/05/22/whi-1050-an-interview-with-skeptic-michael-sherer/ (accessed February 24, 2012).

religious skeptic on a Christian broadcast declaring his own ostensible philosophical and theological ineptitude—with a wink.

But Shermer makes a similar statement in *The Believing Brain* that does not seem tongue-in-cheek. Early in the book, Shermer recounts a conversation he had with a Mr. D'Arpino. In that conversation D'Arpino made some comment about the mind observing itself and thus being both subject and object at the same time. In response to this, Shermer states, "I think this must be why I went into science instead of philosophy. You're losing me here."[32]

In fact, the pages of *The Believing Brain* teem with striking errors in the areas of philosophy and religion. Most of my examples will have to wait for the section specifically dealing with God, but I shall present a few instances.

On the strictly philosophical side, on more than one occasion Shermer states that it is impossible to prove a negative.[33] This is simply incorrect; clearly it is not categorically impossible to prove a negative.[34] In fact, some negatives are effortless to prove: there are no five-sided squares; there are no married bachelors. Other negatives can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt with just a little more work through simple visual inspections: there are no elephants in my office right now, U.S. President Barack Obama is not a Chinese woman, etc.

On a different topic that is halfway between philosophy and religion, when describing the mystical Deepak Chopra's views on consciousness and the afterlife in connection with quantum theory, Shermer quotes Chopra saying, "in body experience is a socially induced collective hallucination. We do not exist in the body. The body exists in us. We do not exist in the world. The world exists in us."[35] After a bit more Shermer responds thusly: "Uh? Read it again… and again… it doesn't become any clearer."

Obviously Shermer is totally baffled by Chopra's views. But Chopra's views are not baffling in the least; they are completely conventional Hindu spiritual monism—the flipside of Shermer's materialistic monism. In the West, Chopra's

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32. Shermer, 24.
33. Ibid., 175, 176.
34. Richard Bornat, *Proof and Disproof in Formal Logic* (Oxford University Press: 2005), 104.
35. Shermer, 160.

views are often called "Idealism"[36] and they basically consist in just reversing Shermer's reductionisms: whereas Dr. Shermer believes that reality is *really* all just material and that "mind" is an illusion, Dr. Chopra and hundreds of millions of other Hindus believe that reality is *really* all just mind and that "material" is an illusion. Regardless of whether Chopra is right or wrong, his point is not difficult to grasp.

A little later, Shermer asserts that "To an anthropologist from Mars, all earthly religions would be indistinguishable" at the level of their fundamental beliefs.[37] Does Shermer honestly believe that these hypothetical Martian anthropologists would so obtuse that they could not perceive meaningful theological distinctions between, say, Sunni Islam's rigidly, unflinchingly transcendent monotheism and Shinto's animism? One gets the impression that Shermer is projecting his own conceptual limitations onto the maligned Martians.

Shermer says that "Christians believe that Christ was the latest prophet," despite the fact that the New Testament itself refers to about a dozen different prophets who arose after Jesus.[38] He makes a similar statement about Mormons believing that "Joseph Smith is the latest prophet." Only, once again, he is mistaken: the Mormon church (i.e. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) has several active established offices of leadership, the current occupants of which are believed to be genuine prophets.[39]

Shermer goes on to inform his readers that monotheistic religion was created during the "Bronze Age."[40] That statement may gratify those believers who locate the very origin of humanity in the Bronze Age, but anyone who believes that humanity had an earlier history and still believed in the one God, would not agree. More liberally inclined scholars advocate that true monotheism was a much later phenomenon—emerging no sooner than the late Iron Age, while evangelicals and other conservative Christians believe in an original monotheism,

36. Berkeley, California is named after George Berkeley, an influential English Idealist. Berkeley's philosophy and theology, however, were not akin to Eastern monism. Berkeley was a Christian theist of deep orthodox convictions, and he intended to use his idealist philosophy to counter the growing skepticism brought on by the materialism of the enlightenment.

37. Ibid., 172.

38. Acts 11:26-28, 13:1, 15:32, 21:8-10.

39. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, "Who is the Mormon prophet today?" The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, http://mormon.org/faq/present-day-prophet/ (accessed February 24, 2012).

40. Shermer, 184.

though God disclosed more precise truths about himself over time in "progressive revelation."[41] The point is that Shermer is out of touch with scholarship on this matter on either end, the liberal and the conservative. Since he has more likely been exposed to the late liberal view, apparently he gave in to the desire to make popular religions look archaic, therefore primitive, and therefore incredible, thus leading him to appeal to the minority view of the Bronze Age date. [42]

We find even more egregious errors when Shermer resorts to a dubious mainstay of atheist activism: positing a multitude of virgin births and resurrections in ancient mythology. Shermer declares that "Virgin birth myths… spring up throughout time and geography."[43] As evidence, he cites Dionysus, Perseus, Buddha, Attis, Krishna, Horus, Mercury, Romulus, and Jesus. But unfortunately for Shermer's wider credibility, none of these men really qualify except for Jesus—the very one that Dr. Shermer is obviously trying to trivialize.

Dionysus's mother had sex with Zeus to get pregnant, and ultimately died from enduring Zeus's god-like "potency."[44] Perseus's mother had sex with a shape-shifting Zeus in the form of gold.[45] Buddha's mother had been happily married before conceiving her son and thus offers no reason to think that she was a virgin at the critical moment.[46] Attis was conceived when his mother was inseminated by the dismembered penis of a monster named Agdistis.[47] Krishna was the *eighth* son of the married Princess Devaki, so again, no.[48] Horus's mother was impregnated through sexual intercourse with her formerly-

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41. See, for example, Article V of "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy."

42. "The ongoing recognition of different textual layers in the Hebrew Bible have led most scholars to the conclusion that there was no monotheism in Israel during the monarchical epoch and that its first articulation came during the exilic period in the sixth century BCE." Klaus Koch, "Ugaritic Polytheism and Israelite Monotheism" in Robert Gordon's *The God of Israel* (Cambridge University Press: 2007), 217. It would appear that Shermer directed himself subjectively against seriously debatable assertions such as this one.

43. Shermer, 173.

44. Richard S. Caldwell, *The Origin of the Gods* (Oxford University Press: 1989), 138-139

45. William Hansen, *Classical Mythology* (Oxford University Press:2004), 261.

46. Carl Olson, *Original Buddhist Sources* (Rutgers University Press: 2005), 27.

47. Robert E. Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology* (Oxford University Press: 1993), 15.

48. Anna Libera Dallapiccola, *Hindu Myths* (University of Texas Press: 2003), 36.

dismembered-but-then-reassembled Frankenstein monster of a husband, Osiris.[49] Mercury's mother, Maia, had sex with Jupiter.[50] And Romulus's mother, Silvia, was forcibly raped by Mars.[51]

As Howard W. Clark (a professor of Classics at UC Santa Barbara) writes, "although Greek mythology has examples of strange but divine impregnations (Danae by Zeus in a shower of gold, Leda by Zeus disguised as a swan, Alcmena by Zeus impersonating her husband) and unusual births (Dionysus from Zeus's thigh, Athena from his head), all the women had sexual relations of a sort."[52]

Thus, as Raymond Brown (a scholar who taught at Columbia University's Union Theological Seminary) concluded:

> "[While N]on-Jewish parallels [to Jesus's virginal conception] have been found in the figures of world religions…, in Greco-Roman mythology, in the births of the Pharaohs…, and in the marvelous births of emperors and philosophers… these 'parallels' consistently involve a type of *hieros gamos* where a divine male, in human or other form, impregnates a woman, either through normal sexual intercourse or through some substitute form of penetration. They are not really similar to the non-sexual virginal conception that is at the core of the infancy narratives [concerning Jesus], a conception where there is no male deity or element to impregnate Mary."[53]

Similar things could be said about Shermer's handling of "resurrection" beliefs. To be clear, when one speaks of a "resurrection," what one means is that someone has truly and completely died and then is brought back into the spatio-temporal world of normal experience to live once more as a healthy embodied person—indeed, that the former corpse actually gets up and walks away from its tomb in health and vitality. According to Shermer, this idea was also rather

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49. Dimitri Meeks and Christine Favard-Meeks, *Daily Life of the Egyptian Gods* (Cornell University Press: 1996), 237
50. Carole Newlands, *Playing with Time: Ovid and the Fasti* (Cornell University Press: 1995), 83
51. Helen Morales, *Classical Mythology* (Oxford University Press: 2007), 86.
52. Howard Clark, *The Gospel of Matthew and Its Readers* (Indiana University Press: 2003), 6.
53. Raymond Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (Paulist Press: 1971), 62.

common in ancient mythology, just like virgin births.[54] He does not cite very many examples, but the one he does cite, Osiris, falls flat: Osiris was an Egyptian god who was supposedly cut into pieces by a rival, Set. Osiris's wife, Isis, gathered up the pieces and reassembled them like a jigsaw puzzle. At this point, now that he was back together in one piece, Osiris became ruler of the underworld. As Bruce Metzger (a recently deceased professor at Princeton Theological Seminary and Bart Ehrman's doctoral supervisor) wrote, "Whether this can be rightly called a resurrection is questionable, especially since, according to Plutarch, it was the pious desire of devotees to be buried in the same ground where, according to local tradition, the body of Osiris *was still lying*."[55] (emphasis added)

Clearly this is not what the disciples claimed happened with Jesus. So the answer to Shermer's snarky question, "Sound familiar?"[56] is simply "no."

Shermer makes a similar blunder concerning Christian apologetics when he states that Christians "believe that the disciples would never have gone to their deaths defending their faith were such miracles as the resurrection not true… *the assumption is that millions of followers cannot be wrong*."[57] (emphasis added) Again, this is simply incorrect. Apologists do indeed routinely cite the established fact that the original disciples of Jesus were willing to face death for their faith. But that fact is cited to show that those original disciples really and truly believed what they claimed: that they had personally seen Jesus alive after his death. In other words, the death-defying courage of the apostles is evidence that they were not just lying. They could have been wrong, they could have been deceived, but they were not conscious deceivers themselves.[58] The idea that "millions of followers cannot be wrong" never enters into the argument.

I could provide further instances of this sort of sloppy thinking and assertions contrary to the facts, but there is really no need for them. The above examples are enough to show that Shermer routinely demonstrates a lack of knowledge of religious and philosophical concepts on even a fairly rudimentary level. Given this sad truth, it is not at all surprising that he feels that the ubiquity of religious

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54. Shermer, 173.
55. Bruce Metzger, *Historical and Literary Studies: Pagan, Jewish and Christian* (Brill: 1968), 21.
56. Shermer, 174.
57. Ibid., 178
58. Gary Habermas and Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Kregel: 2004), 94.

belief "staggers the imagination."[59] It staggers *his* imagination because, when it comes to religion at least, he just does not get it.

(3) Shermer's Handling of the Existence of God

Shermer's treatment of the question of God's existence leaves much to be desired. It is so sophomoric, in fact, that perhaps seeing it deconstructed will lead a few open-minded skeptics to take the possibility of God's existence more seriously. After all, Shermer is an intellectual leader in unbelieving circles, and his book has been widely praised by his co-irreligionists. If even such purported giants of the faithless community can be shown to be consistently irrational and helpless when it comes to the arguments concerning God, maybe some of his minions will see that the movement is without meaningful intellectual support.

To start off, I must make a somewhat minor point: Shermer equivocates and contradicts himself on the matter of religious self-identifications in this discussion. When he tries to define atheism, he reasonably says that one should consult a dictionary and reach for the gold-standard: the Oxford English Dictionary. He notes that atheism is defined there as "Disbelief in, or denial of, the existence of a God."[60] Excellent; atheism is an intellectual position, one involving disbelief/denial. He also notes that agnosticism is defined as "unknowing, unknown, unknowable."

Shermer then goes on to reveal that he thinks that "the God question is insoluble" on the very same page. So, given the above, one would expect Shermer to classify himself as an agnostic. If he thinks that the question is insoluble, then he must think that the answer is unknowable so he would be an agnostic. Not quite; after all this wandering through the possibilities of definitions on the intellectual side, Shermer abruptly shifts gears and states that "atheism is a behavioral position," and, thus, he considers himself an atheist. Thus Shermer's idiosyncratic definition just supplanted the supposed gold-standard of the Oxford Dictionary.

But let us move on to the arguments about God himself.

Shermer addresses a few arguments for God, though he does not always name them. He briefly touches on (A) the Argument from Contingency, (B) the

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59. Shermer, 165.
60. Ibid., 176.

Kalaam Cosmological Argument, and (C) the Teleological Argument. Also, while he does not address the (D) Ontological Argument, he nevertheless makes comments that bring this argument to mind.

We will examine each of these arguments and Shermer's handling of them.

The Argument from Contingency.

This argument reasons from the existence of something that exists *but does not have to exist* to the reality of something that not only exists *but which exists as a matter of metaphysical necessity*. The argument is sometimes called the classic Cosmological Argument, but it is the same argument and a fairly unsophisticated, but popular, version of it can be formulated along these lines:

A. Everything that exists has an explanation for its existence either in an external cause or in its own metaphysical necessity.

B. The universe is a thing.

C. Therefore the universe has an explanation for its existence.

D. The universe is not a metaphysically necessary being.

E. Therefore the universe's existence is explained by an external cause.

Given the way that the argument is structured here, the universe's external cause is either a metaphysically necessary being itself or it too is caused by some additional external cause. Since infinite causal regresses become seriously problematic as a result of paradoxes and incoherencies, sooner or later one is compelled to a stopping point, which is an intrinsically metaphysically necessary being. And given Occam's Razor, rather than postulate a set of intermediate causal steps without any evidence whatsoever, one should just assume the simpler option: that the universe's cause is itself the metaphysically necessary being—the "Ultimate Ground of Being."

In this form, the argument establishes that the universe has some sort of intrinsically metaphysically necessary cause, a transcendent reality beyond itself that causes its existence—nothing more. Still, that is something. Quite a big something, actually. If nothing else it stands as a refutation of Shermer's

dogmatic claim that "In fact, there is no such thing as the supernatural."[61] After all, as a reality that is "above" the natural world as a whole, the universe's metaphysically necessary cause would qualify as *super*nature in at least a rather modest sense.

How does Shermer deal with this argument then? He addresses the argument in the far simpler version that is really just a provocative question: *Why is there something rather than nothing?* To his credit Shermer attempts to tackle the question. But his answer is deeply confused: "Asking why there is something rather than nothing presumes that 'nothing' is the natural state of things out of which 'something' needs explanation. Maybe 'something' is the natural state of things and 'nothing' would be the mystery to be solved."[62] He goes on to quote the rather eccentric Vic Stenger to the effect that "There is something rather than nothing because something is more stable [than nothing]."

In Shermer's answer one once again encounters his inability to address philosophical issues meaningfully. According to the Argument from Contingency, it is not that "something" requires an explanation because "'nothing' is the natural state of things," rather "something" requires explanation because it is a thing, and things are subject to explanations. Nothing—literal non-being—is nothing at all; there is simply *no thing* there to be explained. So the Argument from Contingency just is not reversible as Shermer erroneously believes. Likewise, it is simply false to say that nothing is less stable than something; nothing is not anything at all—it has no properties whatsoever.[63] It is neither hot nor cold, neither stable nor unstable; it is total non-being. So, Shermer's attempted evasion of the argument fails entirely, leaving it totally unscathed.

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61. Ibid., 184.

62. Ibid., 323.

63. It is precisely in connection with this point that the Cambridge and University of Virginia trained philosopher and theologian David Bentley Hart has stated that Vic Stenger is "incandescently unprepared to understand" the philosophical issues in question. "Believe It Or Not," *First Things*, May 2010, http://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/04/believe-it-or-not and see the comment on "Lupinity, Felinity, and the Limits of Method," On the Square, comment posted September 30, 2011, http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2011/10/lupinity-felinity-and-the-limits-of-method/david-b-hart (accessed February 24, 2012).

The Kalaam Cosmological Argument

This argument works like this:

A. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.

B. The universe began to exist.

C. Therefore the universe has a cause.

Premise A is universally attested to in experience and is entirely reasonable.[64] Premise B, however, was in times past more controversial and rested on philosophical arguments concerning the impossibility of an actual infinite series of real things. But recently those philosophical arguments have been bolstered by scientific considerations which have led essentially all physicists to believe that the universe did, in fact, begin to exist with the Big Bang. Michael Shermer accepts this too.

So how does Shermer handle this argument then? He tries to dodge it.

He tells the reader that when he debates "theologians", the argument "usually" goes something like this…[65]

What triggered the big bang?

Theist: God did it.

Shermer: Who created God?

Theist: God is he who does not need to be created.

Shermer: Why not say the same thing about the universe?

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64. William Lane Craig is fond of saying that the denial of this premise is "literally worse than magic." The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology (Blackwell: 2012) 186. As he has explained elsewhere, when it comes to magic, if someone were actually able to pull a rabbit out of a hat *ex nihilo*, at least one would still have the magician as a causal explanation.

65. Shermer, 177.

Theist: Because the universe is a thing or event. God is an agent. Things need to be created, agents don't.

Shermer then goes on to note rightly that humans are agents, so according to the Kalaam Argument *people* must not need to be created, but that is obviously nonsense, so the Kalaam Argument must be flawed. The *reductio* works; the argument is invalidated.

Not quite.

According to the Kalaam Argument, the universe has a cause (a someone or something that made it) *because it began to exist*, and things that begin to exist have a cause. God (if he exists and thus is the cause of the universe) does not need a cause (a someone or something that made him) because there is no reason to think that he *began to exist* at some point—as opposed to existing in some eternal fashion. Indeed, the previous Argument from Contingency demonstrates that the Ultimate Ground of Being exists by virtue of its own intrinsic metaphysical necessity—that it was not and could not have been brought into existence by something else. So to ask "What caused the uncaused" is just an incoherent question. Notions of generic "agents" not needing causes never enter into it.

Now Dr. Shermer does not say who he is thinking of when he refers to these "theologians" he has debated. Still, given Shermer's past encounters with Doug Geivett, his odd willingness to call Geivett a "theologian", and the way Geivett formulates this problem and then answers it, chances are that Shermer was both thinking of Geivett *and* badly misunderstanding him.

As Geivett has written, "After I've sketched the kalam cosmological argument for an audience of skeptics, I'm almost always asked, 'So what caused God?' It might be easy to dismiss the question as sophomoric, except that some impressive minds have pressed it pretty persistently. Of course, there's an initially promising reply, 'God does not need a cause, God is not an event. I have argued that the beginning of the universe must be caused because it is an event.'"[66] Geivett goes on to spell this all out in great detail over the course of many additional pages and the idea of "agents" of whatever kind not needing causes never once comes up.

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66. Doug Geivett, "The Kalaam Cosmological Argument" in Francis Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland, *To Everyone an Answer* (InterVarsity Press: 2004), 67.

So, in point of fact, Shermer's would-be *reductio* does not work and the argument therefore goes through.

To be fair, a discussion of agents (or *agency* at least) does generally follow in a presentation of the Kalaam Argument—just not in the way Shermer claims. The Argument from Contingency establishes that the universe exists because of a more fundamental reality outside of itself that exists, in turn, by virtue of its own internal metaphysical necessity. How that works, though not described in the argument itself, receives hundreds of pages of explanation by St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle. Presumably, according to that argument alone, the universe might be caused in a very static way by a very static cause—just as a building's not falling into the center of the earth is caused by the existence of the ground beneath it (though no knowledgeable advocate of the argument would let it rest there).

The Kalaam Argument takes one further: the universe is not caused in some static way, it was caused through an event, a change of sorts. In other words, action was involved. So the Ultimate Ground of Being is in some sense capable of action; it is not just some changeless, static reality "out there somewhere." That inference does not guarantee that the universe's cause possesses genuine agency, but it is moving in that direction. Of course, this is still quite a way off from all the various attributes of God (e.g. intelligence, etc), but there are further arguments to consider.

The Teleological Argument

So there are good grounds for believing that beyond the universe of space and time there exists some sort of transcendent reality, some sort of thing that exists by virtue of its own internal metaphysical necessity, which is also capable of action. That is remarkable. But it is still not all that specific. Is this Ultimate Reality intelligent and purposeful—something approximating a mind? Or is it something utterly mindless? After all, hurricanes and volcanos exist and are capable of action in a non-intentional mechanical way, but they are just mindless things. Is Ultimate Reality—the thing that made the universe—just the metaphysical equivalent of a super-charged Krakatoa?

To answer that question one can look to the character of what it has made. Is the universe the kind of thing that seems to be purposefully and intelligently

made? Or does it appear to be just the random and chaotic product of some blind force?

For centuries theistic thinkers have argued vigorously that the universe clearly seems like the former, a thing that demonstrates purpose, an orientation to seek an "end" or *telos* and thus its cause is purposeful and intelligent—a genuine agent. Just look around; considering all the dull, drab, and unremarkable ways the universe conceivably *could* have been, it is quite striking that in point of fact it has developed in such a way that it formed plants, animals, and even conscious embodied agents that can ask the big questions of existence: people. Surely this description bespeaks purpose and intelligence behind it all.

Historically, the skeptical response had been that these developments just are not all that surprising, that no matter how the universe was constituted, no matter what physical laws it obeyed, these things would have inevitably developed somehow or other.

As time marched on, though, and science has grown in its understanding of the world around us, that skeptical response became increasingly implausible. Indeed, given the current state of knowledge, that response has essentially become impossible.

It seems that the laws of physics are precisely calibrated—and that to an extraordinarily exact degree—to allow for the emergence of life. Were the laws to be changed in even the most utterly minute way, no life would emerge at all: no plants, no animals, no people to wonder "why" and study the universe that birthed them. Indeed, the theistic intuitions of yesteryear have become the strongly supported scientific conclusions of today.

Shermer is aware of this development in the sciences and helpfully recounts a number of examples, citing the work of the cosmologists Martin Rees and Roger Penrose. Among other statistics, Shermer cites Roger Penrose's astounding finding that the chances of our universe possessing even just one of its life-friendly qualities is 1 part in $10^{10^{23}}$.[67] Such a number is impossible for our minds to grasp, and it establishes that the possibility that some random, unintentional, purposeless universe would allow for the development of life is *profoundly* unlikely. It is actually worse than Shermer lets on though because he misquotes Penrose's work. Whereas Shermer quotes Penrose's number as 1 out of 10 to the power of 10 to the additional power of 23, the number is actually 1

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67. Shermer, 330; the specific reference here is to the universe's low-entropy condition.

out of 10 to the power of 10 to the additional power of 123—a number so large (or so small, rather) that it is literally inconceivable in standard notation.[68]

In other words, the odds that our remarkable universe was just the product of blind forces and random chance (as opposed to purposeful design) is *almost* literally zero. It is for this reason that Michael Shermer begrudgingly concedes that the so-called "fine-tuning problem" (the fine-tuning of physics for the emergence and development of life in the universe, that is) is "the best argument that theists have for the existence of God."[69]

The irreligious are no slouches though, and when the philosophically and scientifically inclined among them have recovered from the unpleasant shock of seeing theism's Teleological Argument vindicated so dramatically, they set about conceiving of interesting ways of defusing the problem. Shermer lays out six of these possibilities,[70] but the fact of the matter is that five of them are so irrelevant, implausible, or contrary to fact that very few serious thinkers take them seriously.[71] And Shermer seems to know it; for all his love of lists, he does not spend much time developing any of the speculative evasions he lays out except one: the multiverse.

The multiverse theory is the one serious alternative to design in the fundamentals of the universe which has garnered a sizeable following among contemporary non-religious philosophers and scientists. The idea here, as

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68. Roger Penrose, *The Road to Reality* (Knopf: 2005) *,* 762-765.

69. Shermer, 324.

70. Ibid., 325-327.

71. For an example of these sorts of weaker evasions take Shermer reference to Vic Stenger's cosmogony computer simulation "MonkeyGod." (Shermer, 329) Stenger claims that his simulation shows that the fine-tuning of our universe is an illusion and that most hypothetical universes (or at least a great many of them) could potentially produce life. How has MonkeyGod been received by others in the cosmology community? Consider the response of Luke Barnes, an astrophysicist associated with both the University of Sydney and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. Dr. Barnes has written that the MonkeyGod program utilizes eight criteria and "Of these eight criteria, three are incorrect, two are irrelevant, and one is insufficient. Plenty more are missing. Most importantly, all manner of cherry-picked assumptions are lurking out of sight, and the whole exercise exemplifies the cheap-binoculars fallacy... We conclude that MonkeyGod is so deeply flawed that its results are meaningless." Luke Barnes, "The Fine-Tuning of the Universe for Intelligent Life," *,* 68, 71, arXiv, submitted December 20, 2011, http://arxiv.org/pdf/1112.4647v1.pdf (accessed February 24, 2012).

Shermer notes, is that even if it is almost infinitely improbable that our universe is the product of mere chance, if there are an infinity of randomly ordered universes (out there, somewhere) the likelihood that some of them will be life-producing increases to the point that it becomes a plausible possibility.

Before moving on to address the specific kinds of multiverses that Shermer discusses, it is important to note that there are a number of problems with the whole notion of the multiverse as an atheistic argument—problems of which, unsurprisingly, Shermer seems totally unaware. Only two will be mentioned here, but there are more.

First, resorting to a multiverse to explain the fine-tuning of the universe is methodologically dubious. Ockham's Razor asserts that when one seeks to explain something, one should not multiply causal factors beyond necessity. It is against this backdrop—one that has factored into scientific theory for a long, long time—that the British astrophysicist Rodney Holder has described the idea of a multiverse as "anti-Ockhamite." As he says, "It is grossly uneconomic to multiply universes in this prodigal manner, and goes against the grain of scientific method."[72]

Second, postulating a multiverse instead of a universe does not necessarily eliminate the strong appearance of design in the fabric of nature. After all, just as our universe operates according to laws, some multiverse would also presumably operate according to laws. So if *those* laws are precisely such that they eventuate in a universe that produces life which ultimately develops to the point of becoming self-aware agents, the appearance of design persists. As the Oxford bio-chemist Arthur Peacocke remarked,

> "Whatever constraints and framework of meta-laws and supervening relations that operate in bringing about the range constituting any postulated ensemble of universes, they must be of such a kind as to enable in one of the universes (*this* one) the combination of parameters, fundamental constants, etc., to be such that living organisms, including ourselves, could come into existence in some corner or it. So, on this argument, it is as significant that the ensemble of universes should be of such a kind that persons have emerged as it would be if ours were the only universe."[73]

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72. Rodney D. Holder, *God, the Multiverse, and Everything* (Ashgate: 2004), 53.
73. Peacocke, 109.

Thus, as the formerly atheistic philosopher turned deist Antony Flew concluded: "So, multiverse or not, we still have to come to terms with the origin of the laws of nature. And the only viable explanation here is the divine Mind."[74]

It is not looking too good for the scientific status or the atheistic argumentative value of the multiverse theory. But things get much, much worse for Dr. Shermer.

Shermer sketches out six different ways a multiverse might be: (1) an oscillating "eternal return" multiverse, (2) an inflationary "multiple creation" multiverse, (3) a quantum mechanical "many worlds" multiverse, (4) a multi-dimensional string theory multiverse, (5) a quantum foam multiverse, and (6) Lee Smolin's evolutionary multiverse.[75]

To his credit, Shermer has the honesty to admit that (1) is totally implausible given the current understanding of physics. Also to his credit, Shermer concedes that (3) seems utterly ridiculous with its postulation of infinite numbers of copies of particular individuals—all different from one another and filling every possible existential scenario (e.g. an infinity of Betty Whites in parallel realities, some the pleasant version known from TV, some a neo-Nazi, and some so utterly bizarre as to defy description). Readers of all stripes should be grateful that Shermer concedes that this option is "even less likely than the theistic alternative."[76] What Shermer does not seem to realize is that (5) cashes out in the same infinities of Betty White with all the same absurdities and thus, presumably, is also less likely than theism.

(4) is much better in that it is not manifestly absurd; but neither is it entirely scientific—string theory is devoid of observational and experimental support and seems to be mostly a mathematical endeavor at this point, something which has led the Columbia University mathematical physicist Peter Woit to call it "not even wrong" as a result.[77] Even more problematic, though, is that a random string-based multiverse (such as Shermer describes it at least) just is not capable of producing enough universes to get the job done. Shermer says that a string multiverse could produce upwards of 10^500 universes. This certainly sounds like a lot, but it is nevertheless woefully inadequate for this particular problem.

74. Antony Flew & Roy Abraham Varghese, *There Is a God* (HarperOne: 2007), 121.

75. Shermer, 328-331.

76. Ibid., 329.

77. Peter Woit, *Not Even Wrong* (Basic Books: 2006).

Remember that if the postulated universes are really randomly ordered, it would require *vastly* more universes to overcome Roger Penrose's one part in $10^{10^{123}}$ odds.[78] So, contrary to Shermer's naïve declaration that the *absence* of a universe like ours in a manifold of 10^{500} random universes would be so unlikely as to seem miraculous,[79] such an absence would really just be essentially and dully certain.

That assessment leaves Shermer with the inflationary model and the evolutionary model. Given, though, that these two models are the most clearly driven by a central dynamic or mechanism, these two are the most clearly subject to Peacocke and Flew's observation about the apparent design of the "meta-laws." Still, Shermer is quite enthusiastic about Lee Smolin's evolutionary multiverse theory, so it merits further discussion.[80]

Smolin's theory is basically Darwinian biology applied to cosmogony. It argues that universes "give birth" to daughter universes inside black holes. These daughter universes eventually produce black holes of their own, and so on, resulting in an ever-expanding population of universes. Each daughter universe is supposed to be similar to (but slightly different from) its parent universe in terms of its physics, thus allowing for minor variations in physical fundamentals ("mutations") to accumulate and compound over time. Those universes that are most likely to produce life are also supposed to be the most likely to produce black holes (and vice versa), so as time goes on more and more black-hole/life-producing universes come into being and life-producing universes thus come to predominate within the multiverse. The idea is that through this process a small number of universes not fine-tuned for life will grow into a huge collection of nested universes, most of which are fine-tuned for life without the need for design.

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78. Donald N. Page (a cosmologist at the University of Albert) puts forward a similarly pessimistic picture for getting a life-friendly universe just by chance: 1 out of $10^{10^{124}}$. Quoted in "A Classic Debate on the Existence of God," November 1994, University of Colorado at Boulder, Dr. William Lane Craig and Dr. Michael Tooley: Dr. Craig's Opening Statement," note 5, LeadershipU, http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/craig-tooley1.html (accessed February 24, 2012).

79. Shermer, 329.

80. The inflationary option is subject to a massive problem with what are called "Boltzmann Brains," but since Shermer does not pursue this option there is no need to critique it in detail. See Barnes, "Fine-Tuning," 61-62

Lee Smolin's idea is popular with a handful of biologists and other non-specialists.[81] But Smolin's theory is not at all popular with astrophysicists and their professional associates, the specialists most clearly qualified to comment on the physical origins of the universe. Even such a Smolin booster as Richard Dawkins admits to this fact while trying to downplay the situation: "Not all physicists are enthusiastic about Smolin's idea."[82]

Why might this be? Because Smolin's theory is a farrago of non-factual assumptions and falsified predictions.

First off, Smolin's theory assumes that efficient star formation requires carbon. It does not. All our universe's first-generation stars were made of nothing but hydrogen and helium.[83]

Second, Smolin's theory assumes that our universe (as a representative life-producing universe) will possess a maximal amount of black holes. It does not. Our universe falls short of such a maximal number by a factor of 10,000.[84]

Third, Smolin's theory assumes that black holes produce baby universes. They do not. Stephen Hawking proved that (much to his own personal dismay) several years ago in connection with a humorous bet.[85]

Fourth, Smolin has stated that his theory predicts that in our universe "there should be no neutron star more massive than 1.6 times the mass of the sun."[86] But subsequent to that prediction a neutron star was discovered with fully twice the mass of the sun.[87]

And fifth, Smolin's theory assumes that life-producing universes will produce more black holes over many "generations" than non-life-producing universes. They would not. Universes that explode into existence only to swiftly congeal

81. Shermer's comment about "physics envy" comes to mind. Shermer, 151
82. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt: 2006), 175.
83. Holder, 65.
84. Ibid., 65
85. "Hawking Illuminates Black Hole Reversal," *Los Angeles Times*, July 22, 2004, http://articles.latimes.com/2004/jul/22/science/sci-hawking22 (accessed February 24, 2012).
86. Lee Smolin, *The Trouble with Physics* (Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt: 2006), 167.
87. Paul Demorest, Tim Pennucci, Scott Ransom, Mallory Roberts and Jason Hessels, "A two-solar-mass neutron star measured using Shapiro delay," *Nature* (October 2010), 1081-1083

into black holes without any multi-generational stellar development (and thus without any life) will contain the most black holes over time, thereby causing lifeless universes to predominate in the multiverse instead of life-producing universes.[88] As a result, "Smolin's cosmic evolutionary scenario actually serve[s] to weed out life-permitting universes."[89]

Now, to be fair, if Smolin's theory had only one or maybe two of these problems, then one could perhaps be cautiously open to it, knowing that the problems *might* evaporate with future discoveries. As Shermer helpfully notes earlier in his book, the "residual problem" should not terrify one into universal skepticism; it is unavoidable that "for any given theory there will always be a residual of unexplained anomalies."[90] But that is not what one finds with Smolin's theory. Rather, the problems have piled up one on top of another a mile high, crushing the theory under the weight of its errancy. As Joseph Silk (a professor of astronomy at Oxford University) has written, in the end Smolin's theory "fails at almost every encounter with astronomical reality."[91]

So, to recap, multiverse theories do not follow the well-established scientific principle of Ockham's Razor, they do not really seem to avoid the clear appearance of design, and Shermer's own preferred multiverse theory fails at every turn when evaluated against established astrophysical science. In other words, Shermer's attempt to undermine the Teleological Argument not only fails, it fails *spectacularly*. As such, the Teleological Argument stands: the natural world really, really looks as if it were the product of a rational, purposeful agency.

The Ontological Argument

Shermer does not mention the Ontological Argument in his book. In fact, he does not even seem to be aware of its existence. One gets that impression from

88. John Polkinghorne and Nicholas Beale, *Questions of Truth* (Westminster John Knox: 2009) 110

89. William Lane Craig, "Theistic Critiques of Atheism" in Michael Martin, *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (Cambridge University Press: 2006), 81

90. Shermer, 162; It is a pity that Shermer did not recall this fact when considering the "problem of evil" as a younger man.

91. Joseph Silk, "Holistic Cosmology," *Science* (August 1997), 644. Silk reasserted his evaluation of Smolin's theory as recently as 2008, see Polkinghorne and Beale, *Questions of Truth*, 158 n. 20.

his assertion that "any scientific *or rational* attempt to prove God's existence can result only in our awareness of an intelligence greater than our own *but considerably less than the omniscience traditionally associated with God*."[92] (emphasis added)

On the contrary, the Ontological Argument is precisely a "rational attempt to prove God's existence" which (if successful) results in an awareness of an omniscient Being—one that is omnipresent and omnipotent too.

Why does Shermer not know about this? Perhaps the Ontological Argument has just resided in some niche where only a few fringe thinkers ponder, or maybe it is some relic from a bygone era, debunked long ago and now largely ignored. If that were the case, then Shermer's lack of reference to the argument would be understandable despite the fact that he is the Executive Director of the Skeptics Society, debates theologians and theistic philosophers, and has written a book seeking to debunk belief in God. But, again, unfortunately for Dr. Shermer, this just is not the case.

Gareth Matthews (a philosopher at the University of Massachusetts who died last year) wrote that "The ontological argument is certainly not neglected today. No other argument for the existence of God—indeed, for the existence of anything!—has received such lavish attention in the last half-century as has the ontological argument."[93] Two atheist philosophy professors at Vanderbilt University, Scott Aikin and Robert Talisse, have gone so far as to say that they "take the Ontological Argument as the litmus test for intellectual seriousness, both for atheists and religious believers alike. Anyone who takes the question of God's existence seriously must grapple with this fascinating argument. Those who simply cast it aside, or wield it indiscriminately, prove themselves intellectually careless."[94] Clearly the Ontological Argument is alive and well, and Shermer's ignorance of it just serves to underline the shortcomings of his philosophical and theological knowledge.

This is yet another argument, then, for God's existence that Shermer simply does respond to meaningfully—by default in this particular case.

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92. Shermer, 166.
93. Gareth Matthews, "The Ontological Argument" in William Mann, ed., *The Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell:2005), 81.
94. Scott Aikin and Robert Talisse, *Reasonable Atheism* (Prometheus Books: 2011), 81.

In any event, the Ontological Argument can be formulated in a number of ways, including one that relies on modal logic that appears below:

1. It is possible that a maximally great being exists.[95]

2. If it is possible that a maximally great being exists, then a maximally great being exists in some possible world.[96]

3. If a maximally great being exists in some possible world, then it exists in every possible world.

4. If a maximally great being exists in every possible world, then it exists in the actual world.

5. If a maximally great being exists in the actual world, then a maximally great being exists.

6. Therefore, a maximally great being exists.

Philosophers generally grant steps 2 through 6. It is step 1 that is controversial.[97] But as the earlier sections of this article demonstrate, there are good reasons to believe that the universe is the product of a transcendent, self-existent, eternal, active, intelligent agency. Is it at least *possible* then that this "Thing" is God and thus a maximally great being? Obviously the answer is "yes"; that is at least *possible*. But if that is the case, then such a statement affirms the first step in the Ontological Argument, and at that point the next five uncontroversial steps kick in and the argument establishes that a maximally great being actually exists—God with all his various "omni" qualities.

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95. A "maximally great being" is one with every possible excellence and that to the most excellent degree (i.e. omnipotence, omniscience, etc.)—in other words, God.
96. A "possible world" is just some logically conceivable way in which reality could have been different from the way the actual world is.

97. William Lane Craig, "Richard Dawkins on Arguments for God," in William Lane Craig and Chad Meister, *God Is Great, God Is Good* (InterVarsity Press: 2009), 29.

Summary Thoughts on God and Shermer's Skepticism

It is clear that Dr. Shermer is either not willing or capable of rebutting the classical arguments for God's existence. Time after time he either bungles standard formulations badly or just ignores them altogether. The fact of the matter is that using the so-called "convergence method" of inquiry—a method that Shermer himself approves of[98]—one sees that there are good rational grounds for believing that God exists. The Argument from Contingency shows that there is a transcendent and self-existent cause of the universe. The Kalaam Argument shows that the universe is the product of something capable of action. The Teleological Argument gives good grounds for thinking that the universe is the product of purposeful intelligence. And the Ontological Argument can spring-board off these various bits of data towards a genuinely maximally great Being. Taken together, all these arguments converge to strongly support the theory that God exists.

Why then does Shermer resist the well-evidenced conclusion that God exists? Why the transparently unreasonable denialist stance? Why the remarkable gaps in his philosophical and theological knowledge? Why the willingness blindly to accept ideas that echo among the uninformed irreligious (e.g. virgin birth stories being common) while simultaneously putting religious claims under the most punishing and hostile, not to mention distorted, of mental microscopes?

As the author Aldous Huxley conceded after dabbling in materialistic atheism for a time, "Most ignorance is vincible ignorance. We don't know because we don't want to know. It is our will that decides how and upon what subjects we shall use our intelligence."[99]

It would seem that Shermer agrees; as he says speaking for himself: "Sometimes I'm even charged with denialism—I don't want X to be true, therefore I unfairly find reasons to reject X. That is undoubtedly sometimes the case."[100]

Consider also this bit from the NYU professor of philosophy, Thomas Nagel, on the "fear of religion":

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98. Shermer, 338-39.
99. Quoted in James S. Spiegel, *The Making of an Atheist* (Moody Press: 2010), 73.
100. Shermer, 162.

> In speaking of the fear of religion, I don't mean to refer to the entirely reasonable hostility toward certain established religions and religious institutions, in virtue of their objectionable moral doctrines, social policies, and political influence. Nor am I referring to the association of many religious beliefs with superstition and the acceptance of evident empirical falsehoods. I am talking about something much deeper—namely, the fear of religion itself. I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that. [101]

My guess is that this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition and that it is responsible for much of the scientism and reductionism of our time.

This reviewer gets the impression that Shermer may share Nagel's sentiments here. After all, that a staunchly libertarian Ayn Rand fan who describes herself as "a radical for liberty" would find contemptible the idea of an all-powerful God to whom she may have to answer is not particularly surprising.[102] Add to that attitude Shermer's own youthful experiences of a decidedly fundamentalist faith[103]—one which viewed God as the ultimate micromanager[104]—and the picture becomes even more predictable. In leaving behind the rigid religiosity of his adolescence for an overly distrustful and stubborn incredulousness, one seems to find in Shermer yet another example of what Craig A. Evans called the "flight from fundamentalism."[105]

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101. Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford University Press: 1997), 130.
102. Shermer, 46.
103. Shermer describes his former faith as "fundamentalist" on page 203.
104. E.g. "as a non-believer I realized the power that the believing paradigm has in filtering everything that happens through a religious lens. Chance, randomness, and contingencies dissolve into insignificance in the Christian worldview. Everything happens for a reason, and God has a plan for each and every one of us." Shermer, 43.
105. Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus* (InterVarsity Press: 2006), 25

Sadly, it appears then that in Dr. Shermer's own case at least, his private dogma actually applies: (un)belief comes first; rationalizations follow. Only, as one can see, his rationalizations just do not stand up to scrutiny when confronted with argument.

Conclusion

Shermer states that were he one day to be confronted by God and the error of his intellectual ways, he would say, "I did the best I could."[106] If that is really true then Shermer's "best" in this area is surprisingly bad. And, given his standing in irreligious circles, that point of view does not bode well for that community's wider intellectual foundations.

Shermer opened his book with a quote from Francis Bacon, the "inventor" of the scientific method:

> For the mind of man is far from the nature of a clear and equal glass, wherein the beams of things should reflect according to their true incidence, nay, it is rather like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture, if it be not delivered and reduced.[107]

In the same vein let me close this article with another quote from that same man:

> It is true, that a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion. For while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them, and go no further; but when it beholdeth the chain of them, confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity.[108]

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106. Ibid., 55
107. Quoted in Shermer, ix
108. Francis Bacon, "On Atheism," in Nancy K. Frankenberry, ed., *The Faith of Scientists* (Princeton University Press: 2008), 74.

Book Reviews

Guide Lines for Contributors of Book Reviews

1) Please do not submit a review that you have already submitted or published elsewhere, including on websites of book sellers or distributors.
2) Please use the following heading:

Title: Subtitle. Author. Series. City: Publisher, Year. ISBN-13: XXX-X-XXX-XXXXX-X (Hardback); XXX-X-XXX-XXXXX-X (Paperback). xxx+XXX pages. Index. Bibliography. Illustrations. Hardback: $XX.XX. Paperback: $XX.XX.

3) Ignore any of the above categories if they do not apply. The ISBN number is very important, however.
4) Italicize only the title/subtitle; format nothing else.
5) If possible, the price should be the original list price, not a discounted price, such as one offered by an internet publisher.
6) Please assume that the reading audience is unfamiliar with the work.
7) Briefly identify the author, but stay away from *ad hominem* argumentation. Particularly, avoid writing anything abusive toward the author. However, discussing an author's qualifications for his or her book may be helpful.
8) A knowledgeable summary that conveys the content of the book (if possible with occasional page numbers in parentheses) is essential. Remember that that the reader is probably more interested in what the book is about than what book you have written or would have written on the topic.
9) Use the "golden rule" in declaring your critiques. Please read the work carefully. Give it all the care and benefit of the doubt that you would like your severest critic to give yours. A book review should focus on the book and, insofar as it is possible, not be taken as a representative of a general position or movement nor as a thinly disguised opportunity for you to vent a polemic against a such a position or movement.
10) Let the subject matter determine the length. A range of anywhere from 500 to 2,000 words can be appropriate.
11) At the end of the review, please simply write your name, followed by your affiliation on the next line.
    First Name Last Name, Degree if you like
    Seminary University College Organization

Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of his Life and Teaching

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Maurice Casey has had a distinguished career as a NT professor and linguist. This book is very accessible, extremely entertaining, and also marked by sober scholarship (a very rare combination indeed). It is the only work of serious biblical scholarship I have ever seen featured in *Macleans* Magazine, the most popular news magazine in Canada.

Casey spiritedly argues that the historical Jesus has been abused by both radical scholarship and conservative, evangelical scholarship. He believes that an unbiased handling of arguments and historical evidence can prove not only that Jesus existed, but that many of his sayings, healings, and exorcisms really happened. Casey is also convinced that the disciples had visions of Jesus after his death (which he refuses to call hallucinations because of the pejorative implications). This admission does not entail a belief in supernaturalism. In fact, Casey appeals to cross-cultural sociological data about psychosomatic healers and the widespread phenomenon of postmortem visions, to argue that, as an independent historian, he can accept many of the accounts in the Gospels, but not their explanation or interpretation.

Throughout the book, Casey is irreverent towards what he regards as incompetent scholarship, but he remains far more respectful about Jesus. Nevertheless, he believes that Jesus was mistaken in his prediction of the imminent kingdom, that Jesus believed he was sinful, and that Jesus was buried in a common grave, the whereabouts of which were never known by his followers.

Besides trying to chart a middle course through historical Jesus scholarship, Casey contributes one main thesis, which he develops more fully than some other historians on Jesus. Casey's method places the criterion of historical plausibility at the center of his investigation; viz., to ask the question: 'Does what Jesus allegedly said and did fit into the cultural milieu of his day?'. Most importantly, however, is the role of the Aramaic language in Casey's reconstructions. He insists that Jesus spoke Aramaic, and that any alleged sayings of Jesus that

cannot be translated back into Aramaic are not historically plausible, and, therefore, unoriginal. It is this linguistic aspect that marks out Casey's work more than anything else.

Casey uses this criterion of historical plausibility to reject the Gospel of John. He argues that Jesus would never have thought of himself as God, because a Jewish monotheist would simply never have thought that way. This judgment obviously presupposes that Jesus could not have been God incarnate and would have been just a regular person within his given ethnic or religious heritage. After all, it would, in fact, be entirely plausible from a historical vantage point that if God had indeed become incarnate, he would be self-aware of being uniquely God. But Casey's rigid use of historical plausibility makes it *a priori* impossible for a Jewish man to be God incarnate. Thus, he forecloses certain options on the basis of his own conceptual predispositions. I could cite further similar examples. Apologists and anyone interested in the historical Jesus should read and interact with this book, particularly because it has become quite popular.

In addition to specific issues we could raise concerning various details, there are three broad areas where Casey's methodology appears to be insufficient to justify his case.

1. His *a priori* commitments do not allow him to see Jesus as anything other than a normal Jewish man, a piece of circular reasoning that results in any evidence for the incarnation being ruled out as failing the test of historical plausibility (i.e. what Casey subjectively is willing to allow to be plausible).

2. Although his work in Aramaic is quite helpful, the thesis is overdrawn. Jesus' milieu was much more multi-linguistic than Casey acknowledges.

3. Even if portions of the Greek Gospels cannot be retranslated into Aramaic, it does not follow from such a barrier that all sayings suffering from this limitation encountered by modern scholars, must *ipso facto* be inauthentic. As a logical possibility, we cannot rule out that there were times when Jesus spoke in Greek. Much more to the point, however, is our recognition that the Gospels can record the message of Jesus without always recording the exact words Jesus spoke verbatim. In fact, to the extent that the gospels record in Greek whatever Jesus said in Aramaic (or perhaps some other language), we are left with no choice but to recognize that, insofar as we have his *ipsissima verba*, we have them in translation. Thus the meanings conveyed by Jesus, as recorded in Greek, do not need to be reconstructed into Aramaic to prove their originality. The conceptual depth can be quite faithfully communicated, even if the original declarations

might necessitate a verbal and grammatical distance that could be wide indeed. Thus, Casey's reconstruction of the life of Christ, by adducing a rather mechanical criterion for authenticity, focuses far too narrowly on a hypothetical verbal slant on reconstructing the life of Christ, at the neglect of the conceptual content of his message.

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If God, Why Evil? A New Way to Think About the Questions.
Norman L. Geisler. Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 2011. 978-0-7642-0812-6 (Paperback). 167 pages. Bibliography. Paperback: $14.99.

The problem of evil continues to be one of the toughest objections to Christianity. After all, no matter how good our arguments will be, the majority of people will not have read them; however, all human beings experience evil and try to make sense of it in their lives. Thus, when Christians need to confront the problem, a good resource on the issue would be a helpful part of their apologetic equipment. Norman Geisler's recent book, "If God, Why Evil?" provides Christians with such a tool for responding to tough criticisms from unbelievers on the problem of evil. Geisler handles the difficult issues as one would expect from a distinguished author (with eighty published works) and a stellar teaching career (at the seminary or graduate school level for over forty years). Geisler intended this book to be clear, concise and comprehensive (10), and I believed that he achieved his aim.

The table of contents instantly reveals the comprehensiveness of this book's approach. It is not merely a single argument finding a way of reconciling the existence of the God of theism with the reality of evil and declaring the topic to be exhausted. Chapter titles include, "Three Views on Evil," "The Nature of Evil," "The Origin of Evil," "The Persistence of Evil," "The Purpose of Evil," "The Avoidability of Evil," "The Problem of Physical Evil," "Miracles and Evil," "The Problem of Eternal Evil (Hell)," and "What About Those Who Have Never Heard?". Three appendices serve as helpful supplements, and they are far from extraneous to the usefulness of the book in the context of today's discussions.

"Animal Death Before Adam," "Evidence for the Existence of God," and "A Critique of the Shack."

The book begins with a discussion on three views of evil: those arising out of pantheism, atheism and theism. This starting point provides Geisler with the opportunity to show that Christian theism provides the best opportunity to contend with the problems posed by the reality of evil. How so? Pantheism asserts the existence of God, but denies the reality of evil. Atheism asserts the reality of evil, but not the existence of God. Theism asserts both the existence of God and the reality of evil. Geisler dismisses the pantheist and atheist views; strictly speaking they do not even have a genuine problem of evil since they dismiss one horn of the dilemma or the other (the God of theism or evil). He concludes that Christian theism, though undoubtedly beset by this issue, also provides the only alternative to find an explanation for the reality of evil in our lives.

There are too many positive aspects to this book to discuss all of them here, but I would like to highlight two of them. First, I am glad Geisler addressed the issue of physical ("natural") evil. It is comparatively easier to grapple with evil found in human beings given the realization that people are responsible for their own actions. Yet, a Tsunami may hit a country and kill thousands upon thousands of human beings for seemingly no discernible reason, by which we mean that the disaster does not seem in any way to be a response due to human error. Then answers are a lot harder to come by. Geisler notes ten reasons for the problem of physical evil, which include observations such as that some physical evil results indirectly from free choice, and that some physical evil should be viewed in the context of an ongoing good process. These statements should whet the reader's appetite to pursue this discussion in greater depth.

Another positive contribution worth highlighting is Geisler's chapter on hell. In the past, Geisler addressed this issue in article form, but now this book makes the information is available for a wider audience. How often does one see an argument that reasons for the legitimate existence of hell? Geisler does not shy away from tough questions like "why punish people at all?", "why punish people forever?", and "why must there be a hell at all?" Geisler explains that "the evidence for hell is biblical, rational and moral" (96). Indeed, Jesus affirmed hell's existence and spoke more on the issue than heaven. Geisler also explains how God's justice; love and sovereignty demand a hell. Christians need to know how to address this very sensitive issue, and Geisler has provided us with some valuable insights to aid in that endeavor.

I find no outright faults with this book. However, I have a few suggestions on topics that could be addressed or developed further, should there be a second edition. First, a brief theological discussion on the imputation of sin due to the fall would be helpful. Unbelievers get caught up in the notion that sin should not be imputed to them since they were not around when Adam sinned. In other words, "Adam sinned, not me!" This point can become a roadblock to faith. One of our duties as apologists is to take down barriers to faith (2 Corinthians 10:5), and Christian apologists would profit from greater help with this matter.

Second, it would contribute to the overall value of the book if it placed a little more emphasis on the nature of grace. If evil is real, and it is, then we would certainly defeat our purpose to minimize the reality of evil because then we would also minimize the importance of grace. If there is no evil then what need is there for grace? As Geisler notes, humans have free choice. And, given such a freedom of choice, we often commit sin. Yet, God cannot bestow grace upon a soul who cannot or will not acknowledge sin (1 John 1:5-9). Yet, since a person sins, there is grace.

My two minor suggestions may seem trivial, but are only meant as possible supplements to such a fantastic book. How wonderful to have this tool at our disposal for an objection to Christianity, such as the problem of evil! The Christian community is indebted once again to the apologetic efforts of Dr. Geisler. If you have ever witnessed to others, then you know that this dragon called "the problem of evil" will raise its head sooner or later. Dr. Geisler has provided Christians with a sharp sword to engage the dragon in battle.

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Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality.

David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls. Cambridge, Mass.: Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN-13: 978-0-19-975181-5. 283 pages. Paperback, $24.95.

In their recent work *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality,* David Baggett and Jerry Walls aim at developing and defending a moral argument for the existence of God. Their argument, simply stated, takes the form of an inference to the best explanation: The existence of a maximally perfect God provides the best explanation of the existence of objective moral truths,

specifically truths of moral obligation. In order to defend this conclusion, it is necessary for the authors to explicate the connection between God and ethics. Accordingly, they devote the bulk of the book to two fundamental tasks: First, they develop their account of theistic ethics, which grounds moral goodness in God's goodness as well as moral obligation in God's commands. Then, second, they attempt to show that their account does not succumb to the standard objections to theistic ethics. Along the way, Baggett and Walls grapple with questions of moral epistemology, address the problem of evil, and flesh out the implications of their theistic ethics along distinctly Christian lines.

In chapter 1 Baggett and Walls present their moral argument for God's existence. The argument can be summarized in two propositions: First, there are objective moral facts that are binding on our actions; second, these facts can be better explained by a theistic understanding of reality than by non-theistic accounts. Specifically, they argue that Naturalist, Platonist, and Existentialist accounts of morality fail to explain adequately the key aspects of what they consider to be the fundamental truths of the moral life. In developing their argument, Baggett and Walls draw on the work of a variety of thinkers (both theistic and atheistic), such as C. S. Lewis, Cardinal John Henry Newman, Immanuel Kant, Henry Sidgwick, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, J. L. Mackie and George Mavrodes.

The moral argument defended in chapter 1 entails that there is some ontological dependence of morality on God. So, to defend their moral argument, Baggett and Walls must be able to explain how ethical truths depend on God, and to defend their theistic account of ethics against objections. Accordingly, in chapter 2, which I take to be the key chapter in the book, they turn their attention to the major objection to theistic accounts of morality – the Euthyphro dilemma, a moral puzzle that goes back to Plato's dialog by the same name. The Euthyphro dilemma, as usually adapted, can be stated as follows: Do morally good actions have this status because God favors them, or does God favor them because they are morally good?

To take the first horn of the dilemma is to embrace voluntarism, or the "pure will" theory of moral goodness. That position claims that God's will (which is expressed via divine commands) determines the content of morality. Baggett and Walls reject the "pure will" account of voluntarism because this view entails that moral truths are established by God's will apart from any reasons and are, hence, arbitrary.

To take the second horn is to embrace a nonvoluntarist or "guided will" theory of the good; moral goodness has ontological status independent of God. The

authors reject the nonvoluntarist account because (as they argued in chapter 1) all non-theistic ontological accounts of moral truths are inadequate. Further, they want to affirm that there is nothing, including morality, entirely independent of God.

Ultimately Baggett and Walls attempt to avoid the Euthyphro problem by defending a theistic understanding of ethics that splits the horns of the dilemma, and at the end of chapter 2 they give an overview of their account. They proffer a *modified* voluntaristic theory of theistic ethics: All moral truths depend on God, but not all moral truths depend on his *will*. The key to their account is the distinction between the moral good and the moral right.

Not everything that is good is also obligatory. For example, it may be good for me to sell all of my books and give the money to an orphanage, but it is unlikely that doing so is a moral obligation for me. Building on this distinction, Baggett and Walls contend that *moral goodness* is grounded in God's nature, and *moral obligation* is grounded in God's commands. The remainder of the book is an explication and defense of this theistic account of morality, showing its plausibility and its ability to avoid objections that are raised against standard voluntarist accounts.

Before developing the specifics of their account of the dependence of morality on God, in chapters 3 and 4 Baggett and Walls address the concept of God to which the moral argument points, and which they employ in their account of theistic ethics. Chapter 3 argues that the being who best explains morality must be maximally perfect in every way; hence the authors embrace an Anselmian understanding of God as "the greatest possible being who exemplifies all the great-making properties…. to the greatest extent to which they're mutually consistent with one another" (52). On this view God is not just good but necessarily good, and this means that God not only does not do evil, but *cannot* do evil. Chapter 4 further clarifies Baggett and Walls's view of God; here they argue that "in order for the moral argument to provide a rational reason to believe in God, God's goodness must be recognizable" (65). The bulk of this chapter is devoted to arguing that Calvinistic theology – which the authors take to be (minimally) a commitment to unconditional election – implies that God is *not* recognizably good, and that if one wants to defend moral arguments for God's existence and develop a satisfying account of theistic ethics, one should not affirm Calvinism.

In chapters 5 and 6 Baggett and Walls develop their theistic metaethical account. Chapter 5 addresses the relationship of moral goodness and God. The authors acknowledge that truths concerning moral goodness are necessary, and,

thus, are not under God's volitional control (contra radical voluntarism). Making an important and helpful distinction between dependence and control, Baggett and Walls argue for *theistic activism*, the position that all necessary truths – including truths of moral goodness – depend on the divine intellect. Their account of the moral good, therefore, is nonvoluntarist, but still theistic. The good, they say, is rooted in the divine nature. They further contend concerning goodness more generally that "… in some important sense… God *just is* the ultimate good" (92). To defend this position, the authors provide clear and succinct summaries of two recent defenses of the "God-is-the-good" position: Kretzmann and Stump's Thomistic account, and Robert Adams' Christian Platonist account, both of which they commend.

In chapter 6 Baggett and Walls develop a voluntarist account of moral obligation. They maintain, following the work of Robert Adams, that moral obligations are ontologically grounded in the commands of a perfectly good God, and in the process of making this case, they give a lucid summary of Adams' intricate and subtle view.

With the major tenets of their position in place, in chapter 7 Baggett and Walls argue that their modified voluntarism is not susceptible to those common objections to theistic ethics that are based on a perception of arbitrariness. Here I shall mention their response to two frequent criticisms.

> (1) The *"no reasons"* objection: God's commands are not rooted in anything but divine caprice, and our obedience is nothing but deference to a powerful authority.

Baggett and Walls avoid the *"no reasons"* objection because, on their account, God *does* have good reasons for the commands that he issues – he wills them in accord with his nature, which is the ground of moral goodness. Further, God created us in his image for the purpose of communion with him and with one another, so a divine command "qualifies as the kind of reason sufficient to generate an obligation" (127).

> (2) The problem of abhorrent commands: If God commands something awful (e.g., torturing babies for fun), then it would be a morally good action.

The problem of abhorrent commands, Baggett and Walls point out, assumes that it is possible that God could issue commands that violate our best understanding of morality. They respond with a reaffirmation that we should trust our foundational moral convictions (remember, this is the basis of their moral argument for God's existence). If these fundamental moral convictions are true

(and Baggett and Walls are confident they are), then their truth is rooted in God's very nature. And, since God is necessarily perfectly good (recall chapter 3), not only will God never command something abhorrent, he *cannot* issue such a command. In light of this response, Baggett and Walls end chapter 7 by considering the objection that the Christian God has, in fact, issued abhorrent commands (e.g., God's command to the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites). In response they claim (in a move reminiscent of Plantinga's response to the logical problem of evil) that there are plausible true propositions which would make these commands consistent with God's perfect goodness.

In chapter 8 Baggett and Walls consider the problem of evil, which, they say, "goes head to head with the moral argument in such a fashion that both cannot survive the showdown" (144). The literature on the problem of evil is immense, so the authors focus on responding to the probabilistic argument for God's nonexistence as presented in the recent publications by Bruce Russell. Their response to Russell is thorough, winsome, and, in my estimation, adequate to support their conclusion that "the moral argument can withstand the best shots the problem of evil can deliver" (158).

Chapter 9 addresses the important question of moral epistemology – given that God's nature is the source of moral goodness, and that God's will determines moral obligation, how do we come to know what is morally good and morally right? Baggett and Walls give an important place to natural law theory, arguing that "the epistemic power of natural law makes sense of conscience and moral intuitions, while providing a better alternative to saying that these are the main or only way in which we acquire moral knowledge" (165). Ultimately their account of how we come to know moral truths incorporates a variety of sources of knowledge – natural law, conscience, moral intuitions, general revelation, special revelation, and societal and familial moral training.

In chapter 10 Baggett and Walls fill out their theistic account of ethics, drawing on their Christian commitments. Here the authors provide a rich discussion of virtue, the importance of interpersonal relationships in ethics, the role of grace in moral transformation, and the hope of eternal union with God in Christ.

Good God is a welcome addition to the literature on natural theology *and* theistic ethics. One particular strength of the book is its accessibility. Baggett and Walls state in the preface that they "were intentional from the start of this project to write something accessible to a broader readership than professional philosophers and theologians" (6). Overall, they achieved the goal admirably. While this book would not be an *easy* read for someone without some

philosophical training, it is an *achievable* read for the educated non-specialist. Another strength of the book is the way that it summarizes and synthesizes vast amounts of work in moral apologetics and contemporary ethics. Over the last generation, there has been a resurgence of philosophical work done in the development of theistic metaethical accounts (the writings of Philip Quinn, John Hare, and Robert Adams immediately come to mind). Yet these efforts have for the most part been confined to various journal articles and scholarly monographs. Baggett and Walls do the Christian community an important service by summarizing and organizing the fruits of this significant trend.

My overview here has only scratched the surface of the depths of this book. I have not been able to present the details of Baggett and Walls's arguments, and I have been unable even to address many other interesting parts of the book. For instance, there is an insightful discussion at several points throughout the book of how moral arguments for God's existence should best be presented, with reasons given for why Baggett and Walls's inference to the best explanation presentation is to be preferred over deductive presentations (such as that defended by William Lane Craig). There is also an important appendix (Appendix A, "Answering the Extended Arbitrariness Objection to Divine Command Theory") that contains erudite and effective rebuttals to the most recent scholarly objection to their theistic theory of moral obligation. I highly recommend *Good God* as an important resource for the moral argument for God and for theistic ethics. Both newcomers to the field of philosophy and seasoned veterans will find much to profit from in this book.

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