

# A Presuppositional Response to the Problem of Evil

*K. Dayton Hartman*<sup>1</sup>

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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.<sup>2</sup> 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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<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> Still, despite this potential congruence, there is no gainsaying that notable theological differences remain in the assumptions that underlie each methodology.<sup>4</sup>

## 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.<sup>5</sup>

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."<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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

<sup>4</sup> Presuppositional apologists are generally (but not always) Reformed in theology.

<sup>5</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1987), 45.

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

<sup>7</sup> *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.”<sup>8</sup> Pressing this fact removes the unbelievers’ confidence in their own autonomy and confronts them with their suppression of the truth of God.<sup>9</sup> 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.”<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

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

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<sup>8</sup> Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 262.

<sup>9</sup> Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis*, 102.

<sup>10</sup> Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 262.

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

<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

## 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...<sup>14</sup>

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.<sup>15</sup> 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."<sup>16</sup> 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<sup>17</sup> spoken of by presuppositionalists and this is where apologetic efforts should begin.

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<sup>13</sup> Bahnsen *Pushing the Antithesis*, 103.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 1:18-22 ESV

<sup>15</sup> Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis*, 38.

<sup>16</sup> John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 11.

<sup>17</sup> 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<sup>18</sup>

Addressing presuppositions presses the antithesis<sup>19</sup> 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.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, according to Francis Schaeffer, an effective and biblical apologetic must push the antithesis.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup> 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.”<sup>23</sup> 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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<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer Volume 1: The God Who is There*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> For Schaeffer, 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.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>23</sup> *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.<sup>24</sup> Sadly, the emotion-evoking rhetoric of the New Atheists<sup>25</sup> 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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<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup>

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

<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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 the scientific method. However, in this context, that process leads to circular reasoning. The scientific method is a viable method by which to assess 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 that they 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.<sup>29</sup> 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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<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> 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).<sup>30</sup> 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<sup>31</sup>, the law of non-contradiction<sup>32</sup> and the law of excluded middle.<sup>33</sup>

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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<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> 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.

<sup>33</sup> 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 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.”<sup>34</sup>

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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<sup>34</sup> Winfried Corduan, *No Doubt About It* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 1997), 128.

truth.”<sup>35</sup> 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.”<sup>36</sup>

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.”<sup>37</sup> 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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<sup>35</sup> Gregory Koukl & Francis Beckwith, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 21.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

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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<sup>38</sup> 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."<sup>39</sup>

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

Apologetists 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."<sup>40</sup> 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."<sup>41</sup>

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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<sup>39</sup> Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2009), 170.

<sup>40</sup> Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 194.

<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis*, 105