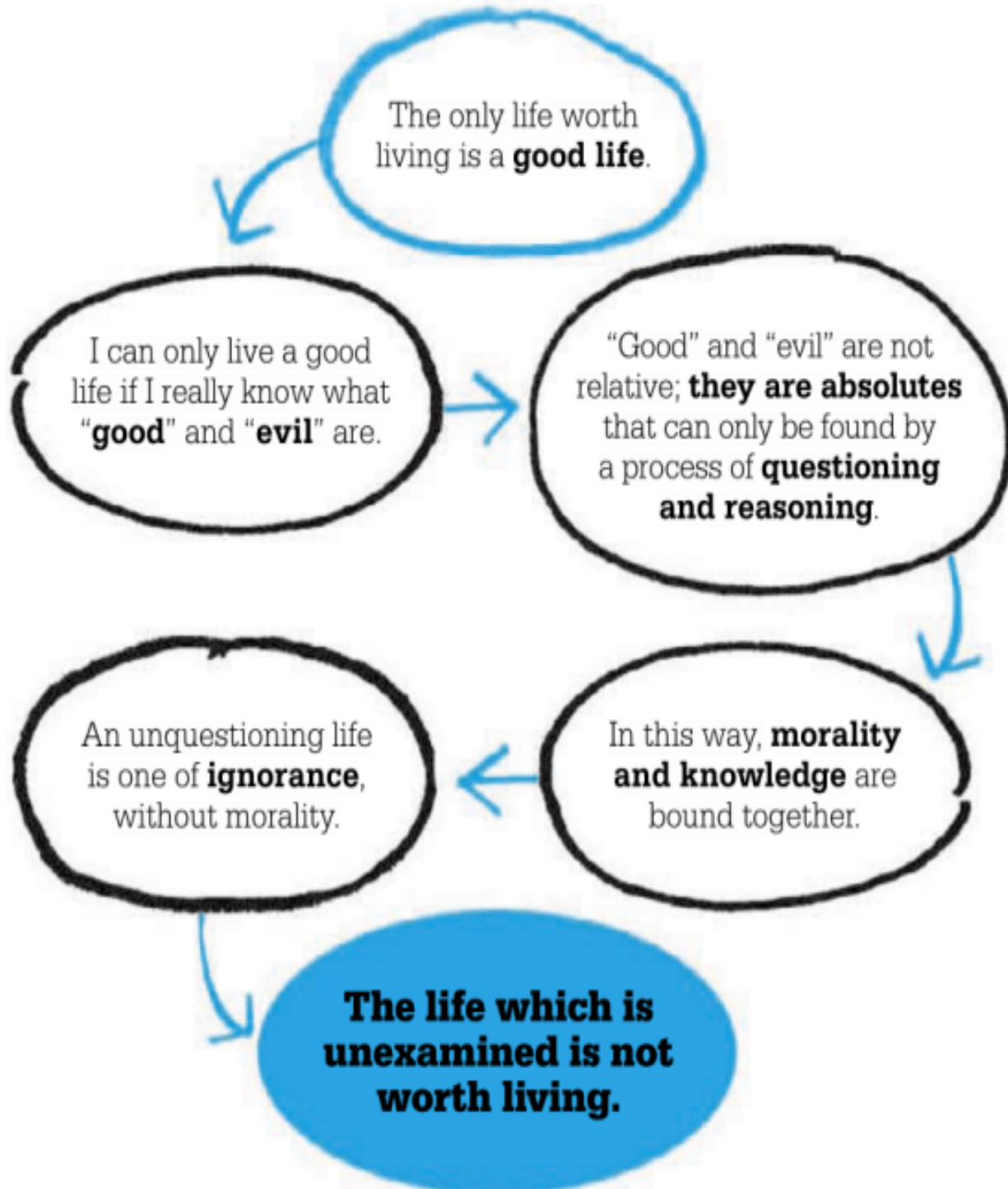


# ADVANCING THE ANTI-THESIS

By David Lee Burris



# The Socratic Process

## 6 Steps of Questioning

### 1. Clarification

How does this relate to our discussion?

Why are you stating that?

What do we already know about this?

Can you give me an example?

### 2. Probing Assumptions

What would happen if...?

How did you choose those assumptions?

How can you verify or disprove?

What could we assume instead?

### 3. Probing Rationale

What do you think causes...?

How do you know this?

What evidence is there that supports...?

How might it be refuted?

### 4. Questioning Viewpoints

What are the strengths and weaknesses of...?

What are alternative ways of looking at this?

Explain why this is necessary or beneficial and who benefits from it.

### 5. Probing Consequences

How does... fit with what our experience tells us?

How does... affect...?

What generalizations can we make?

What are the consequences of this assumption?

### 6. Questions on the Question

What does... mean?

Why do you think I asked the question?

What is the point of the question?

## Plato *cont.*

- The Dialectic Approach involves:
  - Developing an *Open Thesis/Position* & an *Antithesis/Opposite Position*
    - *Example: Trial Court Attorney's debate over the guilt or innocence of their clients in search for an absolute truth.*
- Goal/Purpose: To arrive at a Synthesis/Agreement (According to Plato: Absolute Truth)
  - **Synthesis** = Absolute Truth
    - This could be the original Thesis, Antithesis, or a new position developed during the dialogue process.



## Dialectical Thinking is Integrative

Dialectical thinking is a form of "dialogical thinking (thinking within more than one perspective) conducted to test the strengths and weaknesses of opposing points of view. (Court trials and debates are, in a sense, dialectical.) When thinking dialectically, reasoners pit two or more opposing points of view in competition with each other, developing each by providing support, raising objections, countering those objections, raising further objections, and so on. Dialectical thinking or discussion can be conducted so as to "win" by defeating the positions one disagrees with — using critical insight to support one's own view and pointing out flaws in other views (associated with critical thinking in the **restricted** or **weak sense**), or fairly-mindedly, by conceding points that don't stand up to critique, trying to integrate or incorporate strong points found in other views, and using critical insight to develop a fuller and more accurate view (associated with critical thinking in the **fuller** or **strong sense**).

# PAUL TO THE PHILOSOPHERS \_“PUSHED THE ANTI-THESIS”



## In Athens Paul Preaches Of Another Hill

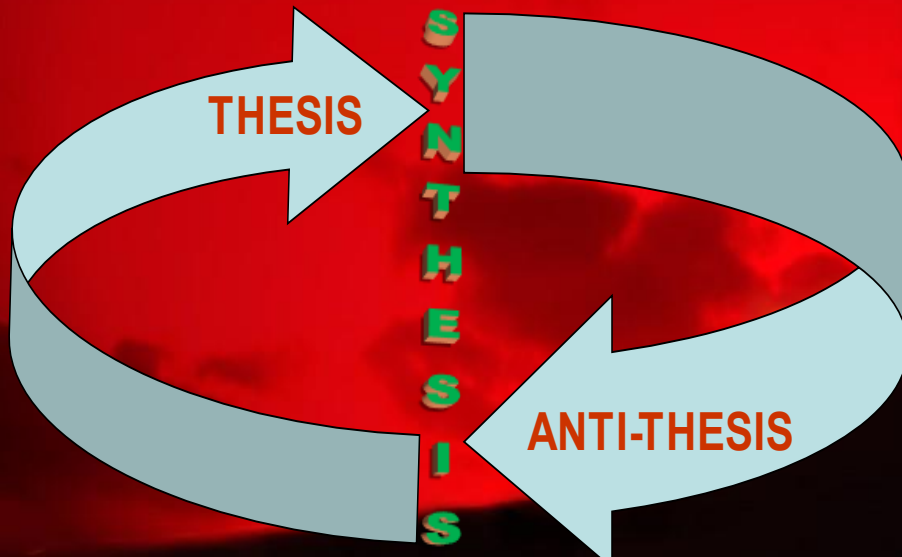
- Acts 17: 17 In The Marketplace Paul Preaches Both Jesus & His Resurrection
- Acts 17: 18 Epicurean Materialists & The Stoic Practitioners (v 21) Wanted Paul For Themselves So They Brought Him To Mar's Hill.
- Mar's Hill Was A Place For Honoring The City Gods Through Prayers & Sacrifice Although Neither Of These Groups Were Really Religious.
- Gods Not Moral Beings Nor Demand Men To Be
- Both Groups Had Accommodated These Practice Based Official Religions So As To Remain Public.
- Oral Societies Considered The Written Word Disguise & Not Elastic Enough To Reveal Depth - Deep Truth Was To Be Discovered From Questioning An Original Source At A Forum.
- Writings Were Either Transcripts Of These Deliberative Dialogues Or Doctrinal Defenses Using This Stylistic Form.
- Following From Verse 22 Is An Actual Record.

## In Athens Paul Preaches Of Another Hill

- Paul Probably Had A Mixed Audience Of Pagans & Philosophers Who Both Soon Thought He Was An Ancient Atheist As Antiquity Defined It.
- This Would Be The Concern Of The Pagan Religionists Who Feared Offending The Designated Deities That Protect The City.
- This Would Be To The Delight Of The Cognitive Elite Of Philosophical Thinkers.
- Paul Proceeded - Like Socrates - To Show Himself Only Really Religious Person There.
- Paul Exposed The Practice Based Ritual Religions Of The Pagans As Belief Systems Without Substance.
- Paul Then Told - In Meta-Narrative Style - The Story Of - "The Meaning Of Life" - To The Philosophers.
- God Create All Out Of Chaos Not Nothing!

## In Athens Paul Preaches Of Another Hill

# 400 YRS: REFINED GOLD MEAN TO DIALECTIC MATERIALISM



## In Athens Paul Preaches Of Another Hill

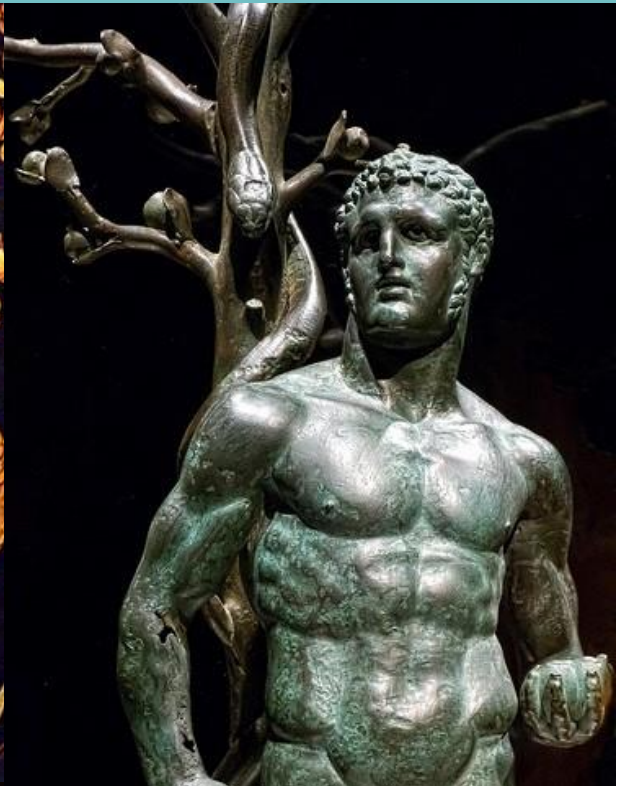
Below Border Friezes Of Mythological Creation Stories He Told Not Of Gods In Human Form But Humans In Gods Form.

- When He Told Of A God Who Would Be Man & Was Crucified For The Purpose Of Our Redemption - It Was Too Much For Them.
- Most Of Both Groups Left Paul At Very Mention Of The Resurrection; Even For These "Lovers Of Wisdom" Accustomed To Hearing Of Strange Religions This Was Different - It Had A Demanding Worldview.
- Belief In The Ideas Of This New Religion Had Consequence; It Was A Way Of Life That Required An Active Faith.
- Satan Kept His Thumbprint On Most Here Who Kept Their False Consciousness Of Philosophical & Religious Relativism.

## Left Side Building Frieze of First Couple



## Ceramic & Statue of Eating From The Tree



## In Athens Paul Preaches Of Another Hill

- Most Continued Then As They Continue Today Wrapped Tight In Their Ego-Centric World Where Man Is Not Responsible Before God Or Answerable For His Actions In This Life.
- Most Continued Then As They Continue Today To Prefer Truth In Riddle Rather Than Revelation - Unsolved Mystery Over Message Clarity - Symbol Over Substance.
- Most Continued Then As They Continue Today Avoiding Absolute Concepts & Total Commitment.
- Most Continued Then As They Continue Today With An Intolerance For Pure Truth Preferring Its Administration As Medicine - **In Small Doses & Sugarcoated!**

## In Athens Paul Preaches Of Another Hill

- Most Were Then As Today **Denying & Avoiding Absolute Concepts & Total Commitment.**
- Most Were Then As They Are Today Intolerant Of Pure Truth Preferring Its Administration As A Medicine - **In Small Doses & Sugarcoated!**
- Thus Mortified Or In Mortal Fear Of Truthful Teachings -
- They Then As Today -
- **LIED TO THEMSELVES!**



## Transactional to Transcendent Religion: Internalized Belief & Behavioral System

Areopagites' Assumptions	Acts 17	Apostle's Assumptions
<i>Being Religious Is Enough</i>	: 22	This Is Totally Insufficient
<i>God Unknowable By Men</i>	: 23	Our God Is Very Knowable
<i>God In Temples Domestic</i>	: 24	God Created The Cosmos
<i>Worship Offering Transact</i>	: 25	God Gives & Needs Not
<i>Peoples Made Differently</i>	: 26	All Men Made From Adam
<i>When Where We Live Fate</i>	: 26	Space Place Is By Design
<i>God Afar &amp; Man Reaches</i>	: 27	Seekers Finding God Near
<i>God Afar &amp; Man Reaches</i>	: 28	He Sustains His Creation
<i>Humans Childs Of Nature</i>	: 29	We God's Own Offspring
<i>God Seen Carved In Stone</i>	: 29	God's Image Viewed In Us
<i>Ignorance Excuse For Sin</i>	: 30	God Not Now Winking At
<i>Deity Is Morally Indifferent</i>	: 31	He Involves Himself Deep

*NOTE: What follows is an edited & rearranged version of three chapters from Gary DeMar's "Pushing the Anti-Thesis"*

# META-PHYSICAL ARGUMENT

## **Overcoming Metaphysical Bias**

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. (Rom. 1:18)*

Let us now look at apologetics in action and the anti-metaphysical bias in contemporary thought.

### **1. Central Concerns**

Worldviews involve three fundamental issues: (1) metaphysics (which deals with the nature of reality), (2) epistemology (which deals with the nature of knowledge), and (3) ethics (which deals with the nature of morality). But how can you intelligibly *establish* your view of reality, knowledge, or ethics? This is an important question that you must answer in order to apologetically engage the unbeliever. Biblical apologetics engages *worldview analysis*.

### **Our Christian Response**

In order to strengthen your ability to defend the faith, you should take to task this anti-metaphysical bias. But what should you think about this antagonism to metaphysics? And how can you respond to this common objection generated out of the remarkably successful, naturalistic scientific world?

Actually, we can levy a devastating response against the critics of metaphysics. Consider the following seven problems with the anti-metaphysical position.

**1. Epistemological method is not neutral.** Though the anti-metaphysical crowd claims to be concerned with neutrality in their elevating epistemology, you will recall that neutrality in human thought is impossible. There is ample evidence to that end, and here we will focus a little more on the matter as we consider the question of *method* in reasoning.

Dr. Van Til argues “the question of method is not a neutral something. Our presupposition of God as the absolute, self-conscious Being, who is the source of all finite being & knowledge, makes it imperative that we distinguish the Christian theistic method from all non-Christian methods.” **Every method of reasoning, every system of thought presupposes either the truth or falsity of Christian theism.** All worldviews are, at base, either one of two foundational options: Christian or non-Christian, believing or non-believing. You need to understand this as a Christian apologist, and the non-Christian needs to be made aware of this as you challenge him. Dr. Van Til explains the situation that exists from the perspective of the Christian system:

There are two mutually exclusive methodologies. The one of the natural man assumes the ultimacy of the human mind. On this basis man, making himself the ultimate reference point, virtually reduces all reality to one level and denies the counsel of God as determinative of the possible and the impossible. Instead of the plan of God, it assumes an abstract notion of possibility or probability, of being and rationality....

On the other hand there is the Christian position. When consistently expressed it posits God’s self-existence and plan, as well as self-contained self-knowledge, as the presupposition of all created existence and knowledge. In that case, all facts show forth and thus prove the existence of God and His plan. In that case, too, all human knowledge should be self-consciously subordinated to that plan.

Let us explain what Van Til means. To get at his point you should recall the record of the temptation and fall in Eden (again, we must turn to Scripture!). God sovereignly and unambiguously commanded that Adam & Eve *not* eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But Satan challenged God’s direct command and told Eve the decision was hers to make. Eve took it upon herself to weigh the two options before her: “Shall I follow Satan who sees no wrong in this? Or shall I follow God who simply declared it wrong without any justifying reasons?”

This is the same method the unbeliever chooses: He asserts for himself *the right to determine proper method*. And he does so without reference to God. Or, as Van Til puts it, the “natural man” assumes “the ultimacy of the human mind.” His *method* is to operate in the world in a way that “reduces all reality to one level and denies the counsel of God as determinative of the possible and the impossible.” Van Til was famous for illustrating the Christian view by a larger circle (representing God) and smaller circle (representing the Universe). The unbeliever’s method does not bow to the absolute authority of the Creator but claims all authority to reason on his own terms without reference to God.

The Christian position, however, holds that foundational to all reality is the personal, self-existent, sovereign God who creates and providentially sustains the Universe by His plan thereby making knowledge possible.

There are only two fundamental outlooks: the Christian and the non-Christian. “Every method, the supposedly neutral one no less than any other, presupposes either the truth or the falsity of Christian theism.” One either has “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16) or is an “enemy in your mind” (Col. 1:21)... One either begins his thinking with the triune God who has clearly revealed Himself as the One who created and providentially controls all things, and Who graciously saves His people by the redemptive work of the incarnate Son applied by the Holy Spirit—or one does not begin one’s thinking with this presupposition. Middle ground is excluded. At base, there are only two options.

The unbeliever’s dismissal of our sovereign God is anything but neutral.

**2. Metaphysics is necessary to epistemology.** Here you should recall a recurring theme: Worldviews are *systems* of *inter-locking* presuppositions. As systems they include metaphysics *and* epistemology *and* ethics all bound up together in a mutually self-supporting system. Worldviews are not one-issue or single-fact constructs. Consequently, you cannot dismiss metaphysics in deference to epistemology.

Your theory of knowledge is just *one* aspect of your *entire* worldview, one feature of your interpretive outlook on all of human experience and thought. You cannot jerk it out of its interlocking setting in your worldview and let it stand on its own. It would have nothing to stand on; it would be suspended in air. It is necessarily and unavoidably linked with your theory of reality and your theory of ethics: Having a way of knowing (epistemology) requires assumptions about the nature of reality (metaphysics). How can knowledge operate apart from the real world as it exists? It is impossible for it to be otherwise. Our theory of knowing is adopted as one that comports with our view of reality so that we can distinguish the true from the false. As per Van Til, “It appears how intimately one’s theory of being and one’s theory of method are interrelated.”

“We could not think or make sense of anything without some coherent view of the general nature and structure of reality” because “one’s convictions about metaphysics (the nature of reality) will influence one’s position on epistemology (the proper method for knowing things), even as one’s epistemology will influence one’s metaphysical beliefs. A person’s metaphysic and epistemology will be coordinated with each other, constituting a specific world-and-life view set over against other world-and-life views (each with its own interdependent views of reality and the method of knowing).”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, you see that *epistemology necessarily presupposes metaphysics*.

Clearly then, your method of knowing depends on the nature of reality (one feature of reality is the question of God). Interestingly, the Bible itself opens with a metaphysical assertion: “In the beginning God.” It is naive to think you can choose an epistemology while remaining neutral toward metaphysics.

**3. Anti-metaphysical arguments are uncritical.** Whether those who oppose metaphysics like it or not, whether they think about it or not, things exist and are related somehow—and *these are metaphysical realities*. To dismiss metaphysics is a highly naive way of thinking.

Herein lies the irony in all of this: *The unbeliever who discounts metaphysics does so on the basis of his own hidden metaphysical program.* He is operating on naturalistic, materialistic assumptions which he considers to be the final determiners of reality. The unbeliever shoots himself in the foot when he attacks metaphysics, since his entire worldview is based on these metaphysical considerations. “What is glaringly obvious, then, is that the unbeliever rests upon and appeals to a metaphysical position in order to prove that there can be no metaphysical position known to be true!” And this is not simply a knee-jerk Christian response to the matter. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* notes this problem:

Opposition to metaphysics has come from both within philosophy and outside it... This hostility is paralleled in the popular writings of many scientists, who seem to think that any legitimate issues once embraced by metaphysics now belong exclusively to the province of empirical science—issues such as the nature of space and time, and the mind-body problem. *Such writers are often blithely unaware of the uncritical metaphysical assumptions pervading their works and the philosophical naïveté of many of their arguments.* But it is ironic that the deference shown by many philosophers to the latest scientific theories is not reciprocated by the popularizing scientists, who do not conceal their contempt for philosophy in general as well as metaphysics in particular.

**4. Metaphysical presuppositions are necessary to reasoning.** Our earlier discussion on presuppositions explained their necessity in human thought and experience. We may view presuppositions metaphorically as a “foundation” and as a “framework.” That is, we can say that they are both “foundations” to and a “framework” for worldviews. They both give a sure base to human experience and provide a guiding framework for human reasoning in the world.

Presuppositions are necessary to reasoning. Every system of thought has some starting point, some standard of authority by which truth and error are evaluated, the real and the unreal are recognized, and the possible and impossible are determined. **You must challenge a person’s basic assumptions supporting his worldview to uncover his ultimate commitment.** You must press the unbeliever to provide you with his standard of evaluation for his outlook. When he offers it, you must challenge it by pressing him: “How do you know *that* is the right standard?” The respondent has one of four options available: (1) He can admit that his standard of evaluation in his worldview has no justification (thus rendering his position arbitrary and irrational); (2) he can argue that his standard is established by some standard outside of itself (thus admitting that a new standard becomes more ultimate, thereby destroying his previously determined “ultimate” standard); (3) he can then keep seeking a more ultimate standard, becoming trapped in an **infinite regress** argument, thereby rendering his standard unknown and unknowable; or (4) he can point to a truly ultimate, self-verifying standard that explains all else, in that it is the ultimate standard beyond which no appeal can be made, as in the Christian worldview which points to God (Heb. 6:13).

Unbelieving systems should be pressed to show that they must have an ultimate authority upon which to rest if they are to objectively and intelligibly evaluate anything. Evaluation requires a standard. When *any* system gets around to verifying its *ultimate* authority, it will have to *presuppose* that authority.

Before moving to our next response against the anti-metaphysical bias, you should be aware of a possible response that the unbeliever will bring against you. He will complain that you are engaging in **circular reasoning** or the informal logical fallacy of **begging the question**. That is, since we assert that God is self-verifying, we are assuming God in order to prove God. However, we should note in response to this objection:

(1) We are not engaged in special pleading for the Christian worldview. We are simply asking which system makes human experience intelligible. For sake of argument, we will grant the unbeliever his system with whatever foundations he adopts in order to see if it can justify its truth claims. But then he will have to grant us ours (for sake of argument) to see if we can justify our truth claims. By the very nature of our God as the self-existing, eternal Creator, our worldview self-justifies its starting point. (We will later explain this two-step procedure of worldview critique.)

(2) All systems must ultimately involve some circularity in reasoning. For instance, when you argue for the legitimacy of the laws of logic, you must employ the laws of logic. How else can you justify the laws of logic? This is a **transcendental** issue, an issue that lies outside of the temporal, changing realm of sense experience. Laws of logic do not change: they are universal, invariant, abstract principles.

In the Christian worldview, however, the Christian apologetic is *not* engaged in *viciously* circular argument, **a circular argument on the same plane**. We appeal above and beyond the temporal realm. God's self-revelation in nature and in Scripture informs us of the two-level universe: God is not a fact like other facts in the world. He is the Creator and Establisher of all else. His existence alone makes the universe, reason, and human experience possible.

(3) "Circularity" in one's philosophical system is just another name for 'consistency' in outlook throughout one's system. That is, one's starting point and final conclusion cohere with each other." Here it is more fully explained:

The "circularity" of a transcendental argument is not at all the same as the fallacious 'circularity' of an argument in which the conclusion is a restatement (in one form or another) of one of its premises. Rather, it is the circularity involved in a coherent theory (where all the parts are consistent with or assume each other) and which is required when one reasons about a precondition for reasoning, its "circles" are destructive of human thought— futile endeavors.

(4) The unbeliever has no defensible standard whereby he can judge the Christian position. His argument either ends up in infinite regress (making it impossible to prove), has no justification (rendering it subjective), or engages in an unjustifiable same-plane circularity (causing it to be fallacious). Without a self-verifying standard, he has no epistemological way out. And only the Christian worldview has such a self-verifying standard.

**5. Anti-metaphysical arguments are mistaken.** In *Always Ready*, it is established that the arguments against metaphysics ultimately reduce to two complaints: (1) The opponent of metaphysics will not allow inferring from the realm of sense experience anything that lies outside of that realm, and (2) The opponent of metaphysics will not allow any source of knowledge about reality which is non-empirical (non-observational, without sense experience). We will focus on the first objection at this point, the other in Point 6 below.

First, this contradicts the scientific method itself. Remember the implications of the presuppositional (and non-material) features of a worldview (see Chapter 4). These features are absolutely essential to science even though they cannot be shown under the microscope, dissected in the lab, measured by caliper, or demonstrated by the methods of scientific investigation: e.g., the reality of an objective external world in contrast to a world of illusion (which allows for objective scientific investigation, the reliability of memory (so necessary to scientific experimentation), continuing personal identity over time (so that the scientist's experience of past realities can be related to the present and expected in the future), the reality of cause-and-effect relations (the very essence of experimental predictability), and so forth. Remember, metaphysics "studies such questions or issues as the nature of existence, the sorts of things that exist, the classes of existent things, *limits of possibility, the ultimate scheme of things, reality versus appearance, and the comprehensive conceptual framework used to make sense of the world as a whole.*"

Second, scientists constantly deal with unseen realities, such as sub-atomic particles, gravity, magnetism, radiation, barometric pressure, elasticity, radioactivity, natural laws, names, numbers, past events, categories, future contingencies, laws of thought, individual identity over time, causation, and so forth. For instance, the whole theory of evolution which controls modern scientific inquiry is a non-sensory theoretical projection back into time which is held by many to be indisputable fact. Yet no scientist was there to witness it. They have not seen any other Universe created or one kind of life evolve into another of a different kind.

Such a theoretical projection as demanded by evolutionary theory depends upon metaphysical presuppositions regarding reality (but, of course, we believe evolutionists to be *mistaken* in their metaphysical surmises). For instance, the National Academy of Sciences published an authoritative guide for public school science teachers titled *Teaching About Evolution and the Nature of Science*. That guide defined science as "a particular way of looking at the world. In science, explanations are restricted to those that can be inferred from [experimental] data that can be substantiated by other scientists," noting that "anything that can be observed or measured is amenable to scientific investigation. Explanations that cannot be based on empirical evidence are not part of science." Yet, some of our greatest discoveries in the Twentieth Century were in the atomic and sub-atomic worlds which were unseen and depend upon unseen metaphysical principles.

Third, the anti-metaphysical complaint is irrelevant to *biblical* metaphysics. Christian metaphysics is not an arbitrary, groping-in-the-dark effort that blindly leaps from sense experience to the supra-sensical world. The Christian metaphysics is God-revealed, being drawn from the divinely inscripturated, objective revelation of the Creator in the Bible. Therefore, any anti-metaphysical argument is established on anti-theistic presuppositions which deny the existence of God. **Such an unproved assumption shuts the door on supra-sensical knowledge drawn from God's own self-revelation in Scripture, which is the very point at issue in our debate with the unbeliever. The unbeliever is therefore simply loudly asserting his disbelief in God as his foundational assumption.**

Thus, the believing worldview operates on the presupposition of the infallible revelation of the Creator. Knowledge of basic metaphysical realities do not cause problems within the Christian worldview because the personal, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent Creator who governs all things has sovereignly declared them—metaphysical realities such as God’s existence, His governing by a rational plan, and His revealing to us the basics of our metaphysical environment.

**6. Anti-metaphysical claims are destructive.** When you encounter the claim that all knowledge must derive from our senses, you should point out to the anti-metaphysical objector that:

First, the anti-metaphysical claim is self-contradictory. How can we know that “all knowledge must derive from our senses?” This claim is not found in the objective world of sense experience. Have you ever sensed it in the real world? It is a non-material, mental construct. This sort of self-refuting argument illustrates Paul’s statement “they became futile in their speculations” (Rom. 1:21).

Second, the anti-metaphysical claim is presuppositional in nature. The claim does not allow for any empirical verification since it deals with the totality of reality because it asserts that “all knowledge must derive from our senses” (yet no man can comprehend all of reality) and is *necessarily* so in that it requires “all knowledge *must* derive from our senses” (therefore it is not a truth dependent on the changing circumstances of the sense experience world of science). In the final analysis, this claim is a dogmatic assertion rather than an empirical conclusion.

Third, the anti-metaphysical claim destroys the very possibility of science. Science absolutely depends upon the uniformity of nature (so that experiments under controlled conditions can produce predictable results everywhere) and the assurance that the future will be like the past (so that experiments can predict future results). These two *metaphysical* claims allow scientists to generalize and project. Consequently, any anti-metaphysical complaint undermines science itself.

Fourth, the anti-metaphysical claim destroys reason. Empirical learning and reasoning would be impossible without these and other metaphysical assumptions. As we noted earlier, **epistemology depends upon metaphysics**. To evaluate arguments requires that we employ propositions, logical relations, and so forth. And these are not discovered through the senses, even though they are necessary to reason itself.

**7. Anti-metaphysical bias is anti-Christian.** As a Christian you instinctively recognize that by the very nature of the anti-metaphysics position, the Christian worldview is *precluded* at the outset. Christianity is built upon the supra-sensical, invisible, eternal, self-contained Triune Creator of the Universe (Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17). Those opposed to metaphysical inquiry are necessarily set against the Christian worldview.

Obviously, the Christian cannot adopt the anti-metaphysic for himself and still be a Christian, nor can the scientist who professes faith in Christ. Later, we will show how you *can* stand on the unbeliever’s assumptions and adopt an anti-metaphysical worldview *for sake of argument in order to show its impossibility*.



**8. Anti-metaphysical bias is sinfully motivated.** In the final analysis and given *your* worldview, you must understand that lurking below this anti-metaphysic is sinful rebellion against God. Spiritual insights into this rejection of metaphysics (and therefore the very possibility of God) reveals: “Men will, as it were, build a roof over their heads in hopes of keeping out any distressing revelation from a transcendent God. The anti-metaphysical perspective of the modern age functions as just such a protective ideological roof for the unbeliever.”

We have already noted - this is precisely what Paul teaches in Romans 1: The unbeliever “suppresses the truth *in unrighteousness*” (Rom. 1:18b) so that they become “futile in their speculations” (Rom. 1:21b). Though man is created in the image of God to know and serve the Lord, he actively suppresses the truth to shield himself from the ensuing guilt before his Maker and Judge, just as Adam attempted to hide his nakedness and himself from God when he sinned against Him (Gen. 3:7, 10; cf. Job 31:33).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DeMar, G. (Ed.). (2007). [\*Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen\*](#) (pp. 109–135). Powder Springs, GA: American Vision.

# UNIFORMITY & UNIVERSALS

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## *The Uniformity of Nature*

*While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

(Gen. 8:22)

The idea of a universe is necessarily bound up with the scientific principle of the uniformity of nature. The *uniformity* of the *universe* predicts that what happens at any given time in the material world will, under sufficiently similar conditions, occur again. That is, the same material causes under the same material conditions will produce the same material results. Uniformity of nature, therefore, entails two important component truths:

1. Uniformity is valid in all places. The character of the material universe is such that it functions according to a discernible regularity. Natural laws that operate in one place of the universe will uniformly operate throughout the universe so that the same physical cause will in a similar circumstance produce the same physical result elsewhere.

2. Uniformity is valid at all times. We may expect the future to be like the past in that natural laws do not change over time. Consequently, even changes in the universe caused by such super-massive events as exploding supernovas, colliding galaxies, and so forth, are predictable, being governed by natural law. These laws hold true at all times, from the past into the future.

## **The Importance of Uniformity**

Science is absolutely dependent upon this uniformity because without it we could not infer from past events what we can expect under like circumstances in the future. Physical science absolutely requires the ability to predict the future action of material entities. Scientific experimentation, theorizing, and prediction would be impossible were nature non-uniform. Scientific investigation is only possible in an orderly, rational coherent, unified system.

If reality were haphazard and disorderly, we would have no basic scientific laws governing and controlling various phenomena. For instance, medical labs do controlled experiments to create procedures and medications that cure and prevent disease, and so forth. Our space program could not use the laws of gravitation to provide boost assists for interplanetary probes. All branches of science learn from past experiences so that that knowledge will help control future experience.

And of course our everyday lives would be inconceivable without uniformity. We would have no unity at all in either experience or thought. This is true at the most mundane levels of daily life, such as walking, riding a bicycle, or driving a car. These common experiences depend upon uniformity. When you successively put one foot in front of the other and lean forward, you expect to move a certain distance over the surface of the earth, not turn into an octopus or become a mathematical formula.

Everyone assumes the uniformity of nature, otherwise we could not know that gravity would hold us to the surface of the earth, that inertia would cause us to remain at rest until a force is applied, that the sun would rise tomorrow, that ingested food would energize our bodies, and so forth. The laws of nature are deemed by scientists to be true (they are never contradicted), universal (they apply throughout the universe), absolute (nothing alters them), and simple (they can be expressed as mathematical formulas).

If we lived in a multiverse each and every single fact would necessarily stand alone, utterly disconnected from other facts, not forming a system as a whole. Consequently, nothing could be organized and related in a mind because no fact would be relatable to any other fact. Thus, science, logic, and experience necessarily require uniformity as a principle of the natural world.

## The Problem of Uniformity

Now the problem that arises for the unbeliever is in *accounting* for the uniformity of nature. Since the unbeliever is so enamored with science and the scientific method, this is a good place to demonstrate his worldview crisis. You must present your standard apologetic challenge to the unbeliever: "Which worldview may reasonably expect that causal connections function uniformly throughout the universe or that the future will be like the past?" We are asking, in other words, which worldview makes human experience intelligible and science possible? All sane people assume uniformity, but only the Christian worldview can *account for* it.

Unbelievers claim: "We only know things based on observation and experience. We only know things that are results of sense experience in the material world." But the problem arises: We have no experience of the future, for it has yet to occur. Therefore, on this experience-based scientific method, how can we predict that the future will be like the past so that we may expect scientific experiments to be valid?

The unbeliever will attempt to respond: "We know the future will be like the past because our past experience of the oncoming future has always been thus." But this statement still only tells us about the past, not the approaching future we now must anticipate... You can't expect the future to be like the past apart from a view of the nature of reality that informs you that events are controlled in a uniform way, as by God in the Christian system.

Furthermore, another complication arises for the non-Christian: How do we know assuredly that the universe is in fact uniform? Has man investigated every single aspect of the universe from each one of its smallest atomic particles to the farthest flung galaxies and all that exists in between, so that he can speak authoritatively? After all, as Kilgore Trout amusingly observes: "The universe is a big place, perhaps the biggest." Does man have totally exhaustive knowledge about every particle of matter, every movement in space, and every moment of time? How does man know uniformity governs the whole world and the entire universe? As "The Paradox of Induction" laments: "We have no way at present of being sure that the universe is uniform. We have only sampled physical nature in our own limited portion of the universe.... [W]e are wanting the laws of the universe to be such that we can understand them, but there is no reason offered as to why the universe should be like this."

This point demonstrates that any and every attempt to prove uniformity in nature necessarily requires *circular reasoning*. To prove uniformity one must assume or presuppose uniformity.

If I set out to argue the uniformity of the universe because I can predict cause-and-effect, am I not presupposing the uniformity and validity of my experience? How can I be sure that my experience of cause-and effect is an accurate reflection of what really happens? Furthermore, am I not presupposing the trustworthy, uniform coherence of my own rationality—a rationality that requires uniformity?

The issue boils down to this: Since man can't know everything he must *assume/presuppose* uniformity and then think and act on this very basic assumption. *Consequently, the principle of uniformity is not a scientific law but an act of faith which undergirds scientific law*. Thus, adherence to the principle of uniformity—though absolutely essential to science and the scientific method—is an intrinsically religious commitment.

Here the problem of the unbeliever's ultimate view of reality collapses into absurdity. He is committed to the notion that chance explains the universe.

**For instance, the Big Bang model of the beginning of the universe “represents the instantaneous suspension of physical laws, the sudden, abrupt flash of lawlessness that allowed something to come out of nothing. It represents a true miracle—transcending physical principles.”**

Unfortunately for the non-Christian cosmology, chance involves randomness and unpredictability. As the source of all being, it undercuts the uniformity of all material reality, for a “singularity” (such as predicted of black-holes as well as for the beginning of the whole universe) “is a point where physical laws break down, where matter is infinitely dense.”<sup>15</sup>

**The unbelieving worldview requires faith in miracles, yet without a reason for those miracles. Life arises from non-life. Intelligence from non-intelligence. Morality from that which is a-moral. These are faith claims for explaining our world and how it came to be. The world becomes like Mark Twain's (1835–1910) introductory comment in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: “Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.”**

The uniformity of nature is perfectly compatible, however, with the Christian worldview. The absolute, all-creating, sovereignly-governing God reveals to us in Scripture that we can count on regularities in the natural world. The Bible teaches that the sun will continue to measure time for us on the earth (Gen. 1:14–19; Eccl. 1:5; Jer. 33:20), that seasons will come and go uniformly (Gen. 8:22; Ps. 74:17), that planting and harvest cycles may be expected (Jer. 5:24; Mark 4:26–29), and so forth. Because of this God-governed regularity in nature, the scientific enterprise is possible and even fruitful.

## ***The Problem of Universals***

*God is not the author of confusion.*  
(1 Cor. 14:33a)

Your positive and negative work [is] demonstrating “the impossibility of the contrary.” You are showing that without the Christian worldview man can’t rationally account for anything in human life, experience, or reason. As always, the trouble for the unbeliever is that in denying the existence of God he is asserting chance as the ultimate backdrop of the universe. But in a chance universe man cannot account for principles of morality or laws of nature. Nor, as we shall see, for the laws of logic.

### **Universals and Thought**

Let’s address the problem of **universals** and the “laws of logic” as related issues causing additional problems for the unbeliever. Though you may not normally contemplate universals, you invariably and necessarily employ them in your everyday life.

Philosophers note that a universal involves three notions: (1) By definition, “universals” must apply to multiple things (otherwise, they would be particulars); (2) They are abstract rather than concrete (therefore, they do not appear in the material world); (3) They are general truths rather than specific.

By the very nature of reasoning you necessarily assume abstract, invariant universals. These are essential to understanding concrete, changing particulars, because you have to be able to associate, classify, and organize in your mind the particular things in your experience. Your everyday, observational, sensate *experience* always consists of particular, historical, objective things. Yet you *reason* in terms of universal, abstract principles so that you can bring it all together and understand it. For instance, you may speak of the particular rock, which you experience through your senses as hard, rough, cold, and heavy. But when you contemplate or speak of any specific rock, you must generalize by abstracting the universals of hardness, roughness, coldness, and heaviness.

## Laws of Logic

Universals include natures (e.g., human nature), moral values, propositions — and laws. Thus, the laws of logic are universals. They are the most general propositions one can possibly hold. They are used every single time you think or talk about anything whatsoever. They are the abstract, universal, invariant rules that govern human rationality. In fact, they make rationality possible by allowing for coherent meaning, rational thought, and intelligent communication.

Be careful in how you speak of the laws of logic. You shouldn't say that these are "laws of thought," as if they were matters of subjective human psychology informing us how people think. We know, of course, that people actually breach the laws of logic regularly. The laws of logic are not laws of thought, but *pre-suppositions* of (coherent) thinking.

The three basic laws of logic are the Law of Identity, the Law of Contradiction (sometimes called the Law of Non-Contradiction), and the Law of Excluded Middle.

The Law of Identity states that "A is A." This means that if any statement is true, it is true; it cannot be both true and not true simultaneously. That is, anything that exists in reality has a particular identity and is not something else. The thing is what it is. A thing may be a cow but not simultaneously a cat. A dog may be all black, but not simultaneously all white (that is, both black and white in the same way and the same place).

The Law of Contradiction states that "A is not not-A." That is, no statement can be both true and false in the same sense at the same time. A person cannot be both alive and not alive simultaneously and in the same way. An astronaut cannot be on the moon and not on the moon at the same time and in the same manner.

The Law of Excluded Middle states that "A is either A or not-A." That is, every statement must be either true or false exclusively, there is no middle ground. Or to put it differently: if a given statement is not true, then its denial must be true. For instance, we may say that something is either a chair or not a chair, it cannot be *neither* a chair nor not a chair. You are either here or you are not here, you cannot be *neither* here nor not here.

Obviously, universals and the laws of logic are fundamentally important to rationality. Without them you could not relate one thing to another, nor reason about the world and life.

## Problems for the Unbeliever

You should recall that the Presuppositional Apologetic is such that it can take *any* fact to demonstrate the existence of God. This, of course, holds true for even the laws of logic and universals. By this stage of the game, you can reflexively utter the apologetic challenge to the unbeliever: “Which worldview makes sense of universals and the laws of logic?”

The recurring problem for the unbelieving worldview arises once again: He cannot *account* for universals and the laws of logic. Logic is crucial to any rational thinking: it provides common laws of reasoning, good patterns of inference. **“In the generic sense ‘reason’ simply refers to man’s intellectual or mental capacity. Christians believe in reason, and non-Christians believe in reason; they both believe in man’s intellectual capacity. However, for each one, his view of reason and his use of reason is controlled by the worldview within which reason operates.”** But which worldview makes laws of logic intelligible? Can the unbeliever justify the laws of logic in his chance universe? Especially a chance universe conceived naturalistically as involving only material things? Once he tries to justify universals and the laws of logic, he steps out of his worldview and into yours. His presuppositions cannot sustain his worldview and cannot account for universals. Let us see how this is so.

## The Non-Christian’s Predicament

Why can’t the unbeliever’s worldview account for universals and the laws of logic?

1. *Empirical Limitations.* When modern man commits exclusively to the scientific method, then he has committed to empiricism. Empiricism is the view that all human knowledge ultimately derives through the senses and through experience. We discover laws of physics, for instance, by observing, measuring, counting, and analyzing the behavior of things around us.

The unbelieving empiricist cannot account for the laws of logic which regulate human reasoning. The laws of logic are not physical objects existing as a part of the sense world. They are not the result of observable behavior of material objects or physical actions. Do the laws of logic exist in the natural world so that they can be empirically examined? If we are materialists, then only that which is objective in the realm of sense experience is real.

What sense do the laws of logic make for unbelievers? What are the laws of logic? If they are just the firing of nerve endings in the neural synapses, then logic differs from person to person and therefore its laws are not laws at all. The inherent materialism in the modern world cannot account for laws of logic.

**Furthermore, since the laws of logic are universal, invariant, abstract, eternal truths, how do they continually apply in our changing world of experience? How do we get those laws from “above” down into the historical process?**

The unbelieving world cannot account even for universals beyond the laws of logic. They obviously speak about concepts, but if they are devoted to the scientific, empirical method then they must hold that only things which exist in the material world are real. When unbelievers talk of concepts, they need a worldview to make them meaningful. But they do not have one. With all of their particulars, they can't account for universals. As Dr. Van Til expressed it, they are “trying to put beads on a string with no holes in the beads.” They have none of the universals to hold things together.

2. *Chance Foundations.* Not only does the unbeliever's investment in empirical science destroy the laws of logic and universals in principle, but so does his commitment to a chance universe.

One of the most renowned atheists was also a philosopher—a philosopher of science. Bertrand Russell took chance to its ultimate conclusion, destroying unity: “Academic philosophers, ever since the time of Parmenides, have believed that the world is a unity.... The most fundamental of my intellectual beliefs is that this is rubbish. I think the universe is all spots and jumps, without any unity, without continuity, without coherence or orderliness...” Oddly enough, at least he was consistent with his atheism in stating this, though the act-of-stating is evidence against his view!

Physicists are committed to the notion of chance as the ultimate source of all reality. As astronomer and cosmologist Marcus Chown comments:

Space and the material world could be created out of nothing but noise.... According to [physicists] Reginald Cahill and Christopher Klinger of Flinders University in Adelaide, space and time and all the objects around us are no more than the froth on a deep sea of randomness.

“This is where physics comes in,” says Cahill. “The universe is rich enough to be self-referencing. For instance, I'm aware of myself.”



This suggests that most of the everyday truths of physical reality, like most mathematical truths, have no explanation. According to Cahill and Klinger, that must be because reality is based on randomness. They believe randomness is more fundamental than physical objects.

But chance can't account for law. Universals and the laws of logic are inimical to chance and randomness: "In a chance universe, all particular facts would be random, have no classifiable identity, bear no pre-determined order or relation, and thus be unintelligible to man's mind."

Furthermore, an evolving, chance universe cannot account for absolute, unchanging, universal laws of logic. Indeed, absolute law contradicts the notion of incessant change which necessarily involves relativism.

3. ***Dialectical Tension***. But, of course, the modern scientist does operate in terms of universals and law. It is just that his worldview can't account for them. This brings dialectical tension (contradiction) into his system:

On the assumptions of the natural man logic is a timeless impersonal principle & facts are controlled by chance. It is by means of universal timeless principles of logic the natural man must, on his assumptions, seek to make intelligible assertions about the world of reality or of chance. But this can't be done without falling into self-contradiction. About chance no manner of assertion can be made. In its very idea it is the irrational. And how are rational assertions to be made about the irrational?

This tension is also seen in the unreflective association of logic and empirical science. For instance, Kyle Ash writes of "logic and empiricism—fundamental aspects of science."

One recurring complaint made against us is that Christianity depends more upon faith than upon reason. In fact, it is as though the whole notion of faith *necessarily* discounts reason. The modern mind is enamored with the rationality of science and pities the naïveté of faith. As Thomas Paine expressed it two centuries ago, since the Enlightenment we are in the "Age of Reason," while Christianity is a part of the primitive, out-moded "Age of Faith."

To modern man who challenges us with Reason, we should ask him what form of reasoning does he follow? Empiricism? Utilitarianism? Pragmatism? Foundationalism? Logical positivism? Existentialism? Essentialism? Idealism? Sensationalism? Objectivism? Nihilism? Intuitionism? Instrumentalism? And why are there so many competing and contradictory approaches to knowledge and understanding, if reason stands alone as *the* source of knowledge?

4. *Conventional Subjectivity*. During a worldviews debate, atheist Gordon Stein was once asked to give account for the laws of logic. Dr. Stein took a common non-absolutist route when he declared that they are “human conventions” agreed upon by man. This was the best he could do in his chance world. In the first place the laws of logic are not agreed upon by all people.

William Dyrness also notes this of Eastern thought:

There are those who argue that these Eastern patterns of thought are inviolable and Christianity must adapt to them completely. Jung Young Lee has argued that in Asia we must get out of the habit of thinking in terms of either/or; we must be able to think of both/and. Change, he believes, may be the key to the universe, and ambiguity and differences merely reflection of aspects of reality. In traditional Chinese thought, yin and yang are believed to be complementary modes of being.... He seeks to apply this to his view of God.

If the unbeliever states that the laws of logic are agreed upon conventions, then they are not absolute because they are subject to “vote” and therefore to change. The laws of logic are not dependent upon people: they are true whether or not people exist.

## **The Christian’s Resolution**

1. *The Source of Logic*. The Christian holds as a basic presupposition that God is the Creator of the world (Gen. 1) and of the human mind (Gen. 1:26–27), so all intelligibility is due to Him. He is the author of all truth, wisdom, and knowledge (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; Col. 2:3). Christians see the laws of logic as expressions of God’s thinking, His own consistent personal nature, not as principles outside of God to which He must measure up. The laws of logic reflect the nature of God, for in Him we find perfect coherence. “The law of contradiction, therefore, as we know it, is but the expression on a created level of the internal coherence of God’s nature.”

We must be careful here, though. We are not saying God *created* the laws of logic by His volitional self-determination. Were this so, then He could alter or discard them as well. Rather, we are saying that the laws of logic reflect His *nature*, the way He is in Himself. They are, therefore, *eternal* expressions of the *unchanging* character of God (Numbers 23:19; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). God's unchanging character is just that, unchanging. Therefore, the laws of logic (which reflect that character) are unchanging and unchangeable, in that God "cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

2. *The Coherence of the World*. For our experience to be rationally coherent, a correspondence must exist between our minds & God's, since He's the ultimate source of uniform reality and coherent reason. This is just what we find in the Christian system: Man is created in the image of God to engage the world in a rational way. Not only is man's mind analogical to God's, but it's compatible with the God-created universe because of God's designing us and our environments. In fact, "the gift of logical reason was given by God to man in order that he might order the revelation of God for himself."

Van Til speaks of our "thinking God's thoughts after Him." That is, we must think according to the pattern of God's mind, rationally and realistically. Perfect coherence characterizes the mind of God so that for us to reason we must think with logical consistency.

## 2. Exegetical Observations

God's own revelation expresses or assumes the primary logical laws. For instance, the law of identity is affirmed by God when He identifies Himself: "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14). God is Himself and not something else. Though the pantheists claim God is everything and everything is God, and though monists believe all is one (including god), in Scripture we find a fundamental & unrelenting assertion of the Creator/ creature distinction (Rom. 1:25; cf. Gen. 1:1). Here in Exodus 3:14 God defines Himself in such a way as to underscore the law of identity. Consider all of Jesus's "I am" statements, such as "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35, 41, 51; 8:58; 10:7, 11; 14:6; 15:1).

The law of non-contradiction lies beneath the command to “Let your yes, be yes, and your no, no so that you may not fall under judgment” (James 5:12). A “good tree” is different from a “bad tree” (Matt. 12:33). After all, “God is not the author of confusion” (1 Cor. 14:33) and “It is impossible that God should lie” (Heb. 6:18).

**The law of excluded middle appears in the notion of anti-thesis, as when Jesus says: “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters” (Matt. 12:30, cf. Mark 9:40). Obviously, one is either “for” Christ or “against” him. There is no middle ground—according to Christ Himself.**

We should note that Jesus used logic (Matt. 21:24–27) and Paul “reasoned” with the Greeks (Acts 17:17; 18:4). In fact, as a matter of Christian witness we are called upon to “give an answer” to those who ask of us (1 Pet. 3:15).<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>2</sup> DeMar, G. (Ed.). (2007). [\*Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen\*](#) (pp. 185–215). Powder Springs, GA: American Vision.

