

A DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The United States of America is an anti-Christian nation that claims to value “tolerance” above all else. Webster’s Dictionary defines “tolerance” as “a fair and permissive attitude toward opinions and practices that differ from one’s own.”¹ But, the cultural connotation has nothing to do with “fairness,” and everything to do with “permissiveness.” In fact, permissiveness is a rough synonym for the contemporary meaning of tolerance, but even that does not exhaust it since a “tolerant” person tolerates everyone except for the intolerant. Hence, anyone who believes and applies absolutes is ridiculed for his backwardness. Our culture of “tolerance” grows out of a modern and allegedly scientific world-view becoming increasingly consistent with itself. The intellectual elites realize that philosophical naturalism provides no ultimately authoritative basis for absolute laws of any kind. Thus, philosophical justification is available for abortion-on-demand, active euthanasia, cloning, homosexuality, divorce, serial marriage, and a host of other immoral practices. On top of it all, the Bible is laughed out of “serious” discussions, the doctrine of the Resurrection is believed to be a relic that should be rejected as a fairy tale from a “pre-scientific” era, and the gospel itself is dismissed as foolishness.

How are Christians to confront this growing anti-Christian consensus of American culture? How are Christians to think about and respond to the world-view bombarding us every day through every medium? If we want to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ effectively to this generation, then the idol of our culture, autonomous human thought, must be discredited. The

¹
Robert B. Costello, ed., *Webster’s College Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1991), s.v. “Tolerance.”

Bible is clear. Christians are to be “always ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet 3:15).² The Greek term translated “defense” in this verse is *apologion*, *apologion*, from which we get the term “apologetics.” It indicates a “speech of defense.”³ The word “referred to a defense made in the courtroom as part of the normal judicial procedure.”⁴ Almost all Christians agree that Scripture requires us to give a reasoned defense of the faith, but they often disagree about exactly how we should go about it. The transcendental argument for the existence of God should attract special attention in methodological discussions for two reasons. First, apologists who use it sometimes claim that the transcendental argument does a better job of proving God’s existence than other arguments. Second, this particular argument has never been widely studied or employed. Subsequent pages will defend the thesis that the transcendental argument for the existence of God is a valid argument, and criticisms leveled against it are not sufficient to refute it. It will not be argued that what has been called “Reformed Apologetics”⁵ is its only right expression. Furthermore, C.S. Lewis and Van Tilian apologists will be the primary sources of information about it. The goal is to describe and analyze the essence of the transcendental apologetic, which is not necessarily limited to any apologetic school.

The Transcendental Argument For The Existence of God

Before looking at the form and content of the argument, an historical survey will provide an important backdrop and help to highlight the causes of its development.

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All quotations of the Bible are taken from the NASB translation.

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Walter Baur, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. And trans. Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich [BDAG], 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “*apologion*.”

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Kenneth D Boa, and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2001), 17.

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Ibid., 57.

Historical Background

In order to appreciate how the transcendental argument for the existence of God came about, a general understanding of the philosophies of David Hume and Immanuel Kant is necessary. These men were giants in the field of philosophy, and their thoughts have continuing impact upon the world. Hume was a “pure” empiricist; that is, he sought to formulate philosophy on the basis of sensory experience alone. In an attempt to avoid the implications of Hume’s philosophy, Kant introduced a corrective to Hume’s radical empiricism.

David Hume (1711-1776) was primarily concerned with epistemology. That means his thought revolved around the question, “How is knowledge possible?” Hume denied the possibility of knowing the reality of rationally necessary beliefs such as causal relations, the external world, and the “self,” but he did not deny their actual existence. According to Ronald Nash, professor of philosophy, “Hume showed that neither reason nor experience is sufficient to ground a knowledge of these matters.”⁶ Hume thought that the “pure” reason of the Enlightenment is fundamentally unable to prove any these things, but he affirmed that they should be accepted anyway. So, on the one hand, Hume affirmed the appropriateness of believing in causal relations, the external world, and the “self” apart from “proof,” but on the other hand, he denied that “proof” of these things is possible. This disconnection between beliefs that are necessary for reason and the beliefs reason itself can prove is called, “Hume’s Gap.”⁷

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was deeply influenced by the philosophy of David Hume, but he rejected Hume’s conclusion that rationally necessary beliefs are not provable. So, he asked himself the question, “What would be a sufficient grounding precondition of these rationally necessary beliefs?” Kant believed he could reason “backwards” from “meaning” to the

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Ronald H. Nash, *Life’s Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 255.

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Ibid., 256.

preconditions of meaning. He called this the “transcendental method.”⁸ Kant’s answer to the “transcendental question” was that the mind must contain *a priori* categories of its own to make sense of the world. Without abstract structures (categories, laws) by which to filter all sensory experience, nothing can be intelligible.⁹ So, Kant reasoned that the human mind must possess these structures in and of itself. The human mind must be its own “law.” John Frame says:

Kant saw, of course, that none of this could be proved in the usual sense of proof. He adopted what he called the “transcendental method,” which seeks to determine the necessary preconditions or *presuppositions* of rationality. He reached his conclusions concerning human autonomy not by proving them by the usual philosophical methods, but by showing our need to presuppose them. Kant’s philosophy; therefore, does not merely assert or assume human autonomy, as did many previous philosophies; it explicitly *presupposes* human autonomy. It adopts human autonomy as the root idea to which every other idea must conform. That is what makes Kant unique and vastly important: he taught secular man where his epistemology must begin, his inescapable starting point for all possible reflection.¹⁰

The hard consequence of Kant’s theology is that nothing is knowable as it is but only as the mind perceives it. Nash says, “Hume had his gap; Kant had his wall. Kant’s system had the effect of erecting a wall between the world as it appears to us and the world as it is.”¹¹ In other words, “Knowledge of any reality beyond the wall, which includes the world of things in themselves, is forever unattainable.”¹² In this way, true knowledge of reality becomes impossible. Therefore, Kant’s solution via the “transcendental method,” did not succeed in grounding knowledge of reality. It merely offered an explanation as to how and why the mind perceives things as it does.

Various Christian apologists picked up on Kant’s transcendental method and turned it into an argument for the existence of God. The transcendental argument purports to give an answer to Hume’s “gap” by means of Kant’s “transcendental method,” while avoiding his “wall.”

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John Frame, *Van Til’s Apologetic: An Analysis of His Thought* (Philipsburg: P&R, 1995), 45.

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Nash, *Life’s Ultimate Questions*, 260-261.

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Frame, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 45.

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Nash, *Life’s Ultimate Questions*, 265.

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Ibid., 265.

Transcendental apologists affirm that Hume was right about the limitations of human reason, and argue that without God, both knowledge and ethics are impossible.

The Nature, Form, and Content of the Transcendental Argument for God’s Existence

The transcendental argument for God’s existence is both negative and positive. Negatively, it rebukes human autonomy by declaring that the human mind alone is unable to justify or ground fundamentally necessary beliefs. Positively, the transcendental argument says that knowledge is only possible if one accepts that God exists and that He is the absolute authority. In this way, transcendental apologetics sees the apologetic task as a battle over the nature of ultimate authority. Van Til said, “Either one thinks in terms of the authority of Scripture, making reason and all its activities subject to this authority, or else one acts and thinks on one’s own ultimate authority.”¹³ The transcendental argument both attacks the human autonomy established by Kant and asserts the authority of God.

Often, the argument is misunderstood to insist that because unbelievers do not have a “God belief,” they *cannot know* anything. But, what the argument actually says is that there is no *way* for an unbeliever to *ground* his thinking and knowledge, given his worldview. Specifically, the unbeliever cannot account for “reason” or “morals.” But, the transcendental argument only “works” because unbelievers really do reason, and because they really do have moral convictions. These beliefs are inconsistent with the unbelieving worldview and are in reality “borrowed capital” from the Christian worldview.¹⁴ Transcendental apologetics assumes that since everyone, including the unbeliever, has an intuitive sense of the indispensability of reason and morality, there must be a sufficient explanation for these intuitive beliefs. The transcendental argument says that the Christian worldview is the only sufficient explanation. In this way, transcendental apologetics

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Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Philipsburg: P&R, 1974), 192.

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Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Philipsburg: P&R, 1998), 297-298.

is a battle between worldviews. The unbeliever can only “think” and “reason” because he is operating partly on the Christian worldview even though he affirms a non-Christian worldview.

The transcendental argument seems to take the form of “*modus tollens*.”¹⁵ Robert Knudsen, professor of apologetics at Westminster Seminary, summarizes the argument, “Given anything that is meaningful – indeed, given anything at all – one can provide an account of the fact that it is possible only on the foundation of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, as witnessed by the Scriptures.”¹⁶ Consider the following syllogism:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{No Christian Theism} \rightarrow \text{No Meaning} \\ \sim \text{No Meaning} \\ \hline \sim \text{No Christian Theism}^{17} \end{array}$$

This logical form of this argument seems similar to some versions of the cosmological argument.¹⁸

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{No Necessary Being} \rightarrow \text{No Contingent Being} \\ \sim \text{No Contingent Being} \\ \hline \sim \text{No Necessary Being} \end{array}$$

Why is there order? The answer: “There is order because there is an Orderer.” Why is there meaning? The answer: “There is meaning because there is a divine and personal ground of meaning.” In this sense, the transcendental argument is not fundamentally different from the classical cosmological argument, which reasons backwards from an assumption (being) to what would be necessary in order to sustain that assumption (necessary being). If there were no necessary being, then there could be no being at all. In the same way, the transcendental argument

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David A. Conway and Ronald Munson, *The Elements of Reasoning*, 2nd ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 1997), 61.

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Robert D. Knudsen, “The Transcendental Perspective of Westminster’s Apologetic,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (Fall 1986): 228.

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Or, positively, if there is meaning, then Christian theism must be true. There is meaning; therefore, Christian theism must be true.

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John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Philipsburg: P&R, 1994), 71-72.

says that if there is no ground of meaning there could be no meaning, but there is meaning, and this fact proves the ground. Knudsen says, “The negative outcome of having abandoned the true starting point is regarded as a confirmation of the validity of the true starting point.”¹⁹

But how exactly does the transcendental argument operate? As it has already been shown, the transcendental argument argues that no worldview but the Christian worldview can ground epistemology and ethics.²⁰ No worldview but the Christian worldview can account for the laws of epistemology and the laws of ethics. Transcendental apologetics claims to do in these two branches of philosophy what the traditional arguments (cosmological, teleological, ontological) have tried to do in the metaphysical branch.²¹ Every apologetic methodology says that unless the existence of God is granted, the world is inexplicable, and so transcendental apologetics is no different.

However, the transcendental apologetic also claims that no worldview but the Christian worldview can really ground reason and morality because the Christian worldview alone is internally consistent. While an exhaustive analysis of the transcendental apologetic would require the engagement of every known worldview, the following presentation will only engage philosophical naturalism as a test case. Naturalism was chosen because it in particular threatens American culture because it has given birth to postmodernism, cultural relativism, the American ethic of “tolerance,” and to the commitment to the autonomy of human thought. More thorough arguments, of course, can be found elsewhere, but the discussions in the upcoming pages should suffice to sound the tenor of the way in which the transcendental apologetic argues against philosophical naturalism.

The transcendental apologetic argues epistemologically. In epistemology,

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Knudsen, “The Transcendental Perspective,” 234-235.

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“Epistemology” is the study of knowledge, and “ethics” is the study of right and wrong.

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“Metaphysics” or “ontology” is the study of what exists.

transcendental apologists point out that philosophical naturalism cannot ground rationality, the laws of logic, or the principle of induction. In his book, *Miracles*, C.S. Lewis demonstrates that confidence in the rationality of the human mind is undermined by the naturalistic assumption of evolution.²² That is to say, on an evolutionary scheme, reason evolved out of irrationality. Such a notion involves a serious problem. Consider that at some point in the evolutionary development of human beings, they moved from being an irrational form of life to a rational form of life. An important question emerges from this assumption. How can anyone assume that human beings are genuinely rational today and that they are not lacking some ingredient necessary to true knowledge? Is it really rational to trust the product of irrationality? The rational conclusion appears to be “no.” It is impossible to account for rationality in an evolved universe. Therefore, naturalistic evolution undermines confidence in reason. This further shows that the naturalist presupposition of the full reliability of reason and the naturalist presupposition of the evolutionary development of the world are inconsistent with one another.

While philosophical naturalists cannot account for the rationality and accuracy of logical categories in the minds of human beings, Christian theists can. If God created both the world (raw data of reality: what Kant called percepts) and the categories of the human mind (what Kant called concepts), and if He created them to reflect the thinking of His own mind and to correspond to each other such that true knowledge of the external world is possible, then human beings can have true and accurate knowledge of the external world.²³ This would solve the problem that Kant tried to solve, but could not solve. Biblical theism teaches that God made the human mind able to comprehend the external world. Kant’s “wall,” therefore, comes tumbling down. This answers the causal question of the existence of mental categories. That is, our minds

²²C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: HarperCollins, 1947), 17-36.²³Ronald Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Philipsburg: P&R, 1982), 79-90.

can understand the external world because God made them both. But it does not answer the question of authority. On what basis and authority can a Christian know that this is true?

On the Christian worldview, how can we know that God made our minds with the ability to perceive the external world truly and correctly? The answer is that God reveals this to us infallibly in His Word. He expects us to trust our senses when we read His Word, and He proves that reason is trustworthy by reasoning with us in Scripture. Therefore, our minds must be capable of perceiving actual reality because God declares it in Holy Writ. Though it is not apparent that any transcendental apologist denies this, Reformed Apologists argue for the necessity of biblical revelation most explicitly.²⁴ In itself, this is no argument against naturalism; rather, it is a sub-argument within the context of Christian theism. It supports the Christian claim on the basis of the Christian worldview that only the Christian worldview can account for knowledge.

Transcendental apologists also argue that philosophical naturalism cannot account for the laws of logic.²⁵ Because naturalism is committed to a materialistic metaphysic, there is no room in its system for abstract universal and absolute laws of any kind. Acknowledging this and wanting to avoid the implications, philosophical naturalists may insist that the laws of logic are an inherent property of matter. But, it is not at all apparent that the laws of logic are a property of matter, especially since many of the laws of logic apply only to the relationships between other abstract ideas and say nothing at all about matter. The naturalist may also try to ground the laws of logic in mathematics, but there is no consensus that the laws of logic are in fact grounded in mathematics. Furthermore, even if it were granted that the laws of logic were grounded in mathematics, the materialistic worldview has exactly the same problem accounting for mathematics. What are the principles of mathematics on a naturalistic worldview? Are they laws?

²⁴Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 712-713.²⁵Greg Bahnsen, *The Great Debate*, Covenant Media Foundation, 1985, Cassette. This was a debate conducted at the University of California, Irvine, between atheist Gordon Stein and theist Greg Bahnsen.

Are they absolute? No absolute laws “exist” on a naturalistic framework. Some Atheists may try to solve the problem of the laws of logic by claiming that they are merely social conventions.²⁶ But this is entirely unsatisfactory; since, if the laws of logic are simply social conventions, then it would be wrong for people of western society to insist that the people of any other society abide by the “laws of logic” used in western society. The possibility of communication between societies would totally disappear because they would legitimately operate on different conventions of logic, which would be neither universal nor invariant. This very idea is absurd, and no one really believes such a thing when it comes down to it. People everywhere adhere to the law of non-contradiction when they use language. Hence, philosophical naturalism does not appear to have an explanation for the laws of logic, and it does not appear that an explanation will ever be coming from their worldview.

While philosophical naturalism is not able to account for the laws of logic on its worldview, the laws of logic can be explained in terms of the Christian worldview. Ask the transcendental question, “What would be a sufficient grounding precondition of the laws of logic?” The answer is that “An internally consistent worldview would need to be true in which immaterial and abstract realities are possible.” It just so happens that the Christian worldview is able to account for immaterial and abstract reality. On the Christian worldview, God is immaterial and the laws of logic are a necessary, invariant, abstract and transcendent function of His own mind. If the God of the Christian worldview did not exist, then nothing could exist, not even the laws of logic, which are not separate from God Himself.²⁷ At this juncture, the Atheist could object, “Saying it is so does not make it so!” But such an objection entirely misses the point. Materialism says that only material exists, but by definition, abstract laws are immaterial.

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Dr. Gordon Stein made this claim in his debate with Greg Bahnsen.

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John Frame, *A Second Response to Martin* [on-line]; accessed 7 November 2003; available from http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/martin/frame_contra_martin2.html; Internet.

Therefore, materialism cannot ever give an answer to this problem. Christian theism is the only defensible form of revelational theism; therefore, it alone resolves the conundrum.

One particular law of logic with which philosophical naturalists have special difficulty is induction. Inductive reasoning moves from the smaller to the greater. An example of induction would run as follows: since in the past the sun has always risen in the morning (smaller), the sun will rise in the morning tomorrow (greater). But, induction rests on an assumption: the uniformity of nature. That is, induction assumes that the universe behaves in an orderly fashion and that events are regular because they have sufficient causes. The whole scientific enterprise rests on this premise. Science assumes that there are causal explanations for natural phenomena, and it assumes that it can formulate laws that can explain these phenomena. Simply put, without induction science could not exist. Therefore, the philosophical naturalist needs to ground induction in his worldview or else his worldview does not explain reality. However, David Hume demonstrated that causal relationships cannot be proven by “pure” reason. To try to ground induction by saying that induction has “always worked in the past” is to beg the question. To argue that way uses induction to prove induction: induction worked in the past (smaller); therefore, it will work in the future (greater). To make matters worse, the now widely embraced doctrine of quantum physics in the scientific community declares that sub-atomic particles do not behave in an orderly fashion, but that their movements are purely random and have no sufficient cause. If this is true, then at one level at least, nature is not uniform and science can never move beyond predicting movements by raw mathematical probability. So it seems that presently at least, philosophical naturalists have little reason to believe that nature is only and always uniform, but this is precisely what is required in order to know that induction is reliable and for science itself to move forward.

Unlike the naturalist worldview, the Christian worldview is able to ground the

uniformity of nature. Ask the transcendental question, “What would be a sufficient grounding precondition of the uniformity of nature?” The answer is that an internally consistent worldview would need to be true in which it were possible to know that causal relationships exist and that the causal chain extends indefinitely into the future. Because the Christian worldview embraces a God who knows everything and because this God has revealed that induction is possible and that nature is orderly (cf. Gen 8:22), it is possible to know with perfect confidence that nature is uniform. Simply put, without an infinite and all knowing God who reveals that knowledge is possible, it would be impossible to know that knowledge is possible. But, the critic says, “This is all just wishful thinking.” It is not wishful thinking because the argument positively establishes that apart from exhaustive knowledge (something a finite creature will never possess), it is impossible to know anything certainly. If it is granted that it must be possible to know anything certainly (as our intuition tells us), then it must also be granted that God exists.²⁸

The transcendental apologetic also argues ethically. Finally, transcendental apologetics says that without the Christian worldview, moral norms are impossible. Philosophical naturalists find it impossible to ground laws of any sort, and ethical laws are no exception to this ironclad rule. In philosophical naturalism, “laws” begin and end in the autonomous human being. Naturalism teaches that human beings are complex biochemical mechanisms who have evolved from lower life forms. No one ever argues that cockroaches sometimes behave unethically, but at some point in the evolution of human beings, naturalists want to say that they became subject to the norms of “right” and “wrong.” Moral intuitions eventually evolved. But if they evolved, then they are simply a product of cause and effect, and how can there be anything unethical or “wrong” about going against the evolved moral intuition? How can universal abstract laws of ethics arise from evolution? Further, evolution does not seem to be able to account for every ethical principle.

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Frame, *Apologetics*, 103.

The ethical ideal of “self-sacrificial love” is apparently inconsistent with the micro-evolutionary notion of the “survival of the fittest,” since a person who sacrificed himself would clearly not survive.²⁹ More consistent naturalists may try to argue that morals are not absolute; rather, they are social conventions, agreed upon by the majority in any given culture.³⁰ But this appears to be purely arbitrary. If morals are arbitrarily agreed upon by different cultures, then why must any individual agree to abide by them? Why must any individual conform to the norms imposed upon him by society? Why may an individual not value “going against” cultural norms? In an Atheist universe, it becomes impossible to say that anything whatsoever is “wrong” or “right” because there is no authority beyond the autonomous human being. The most an Atheist can say consistently is that he “prefers” this sort of behavior to that sort. But this has nothing to do with an objective moral standard; instead, it has to do with a person’s likes and dislikes. It has only to do with “feelings,” and feelings are merely subjective and individual. They are never normative. In consistent philosophical naturalism, ethics reduce to pure subjectivism, and this is in fact where American society has been moving for a very long time.

But, thankfully, philosophical naturalism is stubbornly resistant to becoming “purely” consistent with its own worldview. It simply cannot bring itself to embrace all the consequences that follow from it. The fact is that every single human being becomes a moral absolutist when he is wronged. No one believes that the moral standards of terrorists are merely matters of “preference.” The entire national conscience erupted with outrage on September 11, 2001 because everyone knew that a moral absolute was violated. Even though the terrorists’ acts may have been morally praiseworthy in their own culture, America did not even consider justifying them on that

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It would seem that the ideal of “self-sacrifice” would be more of a hindrance to survival than help; since, those who sacrifice themselves would eventually be weeded out by natural selection. Nevertheless, “self-sacrifice” is almost universally recognized as a virtue.

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Bahnsen, *The Great Debate*, audiocassette. Gordon Stein argued that society determines what is moral and what is immoral.

ground. The words “wicked” and “evil” were used unsparingly in the public square after the towers fell. The moral outrage directed toward perpetrators of moral evil is precisely the non-neutral yet common ground that the Christian shares with the non-Christian. This ground is not “neutral” because the moral standard belongs to God. But, it is “common” because every human being has a divinely created conscience with some sense of right and wrong.

Now, ask the transcendental question, “What would be a sufficient grounding precondition of moral norms?” The answer is that an internally consistent worldview would need to be true in which there exists an absolutely authoritative lawgiver. Transcendental apologetics argues that the Christian worldview alone satisfies this requirement.³¹ Frame says, “The argument is transcendental. Rather than offering straightforward empirical evidence for God, it asks the deeper question: what must be the case if evidential argument and knowledge (and hence objective moral standards) are to be possible.”³² According to Scripture, the moral law is not the arbitrary command of God that could have been different than it is. Morals do not exist outside of God or above God; rather, they are grounded in His eternal and transcendent character. Since God created the world, He has the authority to require human moral agents to obey Him and that is exactly what He does. The denial of God’s existence would result in the impossibility of moral norms. But moral norms are indispensable to life, and no one in reality operates on the basis of a purely subjective ethic. Therefore, God’s existence is proved from the impossibility of the contrary.

Another version of the transcendental argument from morals is what Tommy Allen calls the “transcendental argument from myth.”³³ In his essay, Allen chronicles C.S. Lewis’ journey from disbelief in the truth of myth to the conviction of its power and divine origin. The fact is that

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Frame, *Apologetics*, 93-102.

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Ibid., 101.

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Tommy Allen, *Transcendental Argument: Contours of C.S. Lewis’ Apologetic* [on-line]; accessed 7 November 2003; available from <http://capo.org/premise/97/Dec/p971206.html>; Internet.

myths resonate with people everywhere. Themes that touch every human being permeate this literary genre. Hollywood continues to produce movies of remarkably poor quality, but in the midst of it all appears Tolkien's trilogy, *The Lord of The Rings*, and the public has responded accordingly with great approbation. These movies strike a chord deep within the hearts of multitudes of people because the values they communicate ring true universally. According to Allen, "Tolkien explained to Lewis that myths were not lies. . . . our imaginative inventions must originate with God, and must in consequence reflect something of that eternal truth."³⁴ Allen says:

Tolkien continued over a long period of time to convince Lewis that myths have truth contained in them. Lewis was unsure how the death and resurrection could have saved the world. Tolkien had been explaining earlier how myths were "God expressing himself through the minds of poets, and using the images of their 'mythopoeia' to express fragments of eternal truth." Tolkien proceeded in telling Lewis how Christianity was a myth but different because God invented it with actual history and the people were real. Lewis responded: "You mean," asked Lewis, "that the story of Christ is simply a true myth, a myth that works on us in the same way as the others, but a myth that really happened? In that case, I begin to understand."³⁵

What can possibly explain the truth-value that characterizes myths but a God whose very nature is truth? Allen goes on to explain that just days later, Lewis told Tolkien that he was convinced of the gospel of Christ. How is this a transcendental argument? Well, the genre of myth goes far beyond the bounds of "reason" and "observable reality." It actually casts a "super-natural" interpretation upon human experience. It might be argued that this is not really a "transcendental argument" because human existence is conceivable without "myth," while human existence is not conceivable without "morals" and "knowledge." In this sense, the transcendental argument from myth does not really argue from the "impossibility of the contrary." Nevertheless myths are real and their power is real. Is there any other conceivable grounding precondition of the power and reality of "myth" than God? Let the reader decide.

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Allen, *Transcendental Argument*.

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Ibid.

Analysis of Alleged Methodological Implications

Should The Transcendental Argument be Used Exclusively?

John Frame points out that no single argument can stand by itself because supporting arguments are required to defend any argument when challenged.³⁶ Furthermore, there is no reason a transcendental apologist ought to refuse to use the other proofs and evidences should an inquiring unbeliever require them. The transcendental argument is the *basic* apologetical argument. It exposes the fact that unbelieving worldviews cannot account for meaning and hence cannot account for argument. Then it shows how the Christian worldview provides all the preconditions of meaning. But, given the Christian worldview, there is no reason not to show that a personal, intelligent, ground of being is required to explain the existence of the universe (Psa 19). There is no reason, then, not to establish the reliability of the text of Scripture (Lk 4:17), the phenomena of fulfilled prophecy (Lk 4:21), the claims of deity made by Christ (Jn 8:58) and the Resurrection (Lk 1:3; 1 Cor 15:14). However, these arguments only work to the degree in which one already presupposes the principles of the Christian worldview. To the extent that the unbeliever's presuppositions remain unchallenged he is free to interpret these "evidential" arguments according to those faulty foundations. The transcendental argument, on the other hand, furnishes the apologist with a way to attack the very foundation of the unbelieving worldview while establishing the foundation of the Christian worldview. Nevertheless, in some apologetic instances, it may be most appropriate to skip the transcendental argument entirely because the person with whom the apologist is engaged in discussion does not require it. But, in terms of methodology, the transcendental argument belongs at the *base* of the apologetical task because it establishes that the only sufficient ground of meaning is the God of Christian theism.

Is The Transcendental Argument a "Circular" Argument?

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Frame, *Apologetics*, 73.

One logical fallacy included in every introduction to reasoning textbook is called “begging the question” or “circular reasoning.” This fallacy is defined as using a premise “to support a conclusion while the conclusion is at least implicitly appealed to in support of the premise.”³⁷ But, does the transcendental argument commit this fallacy? Clearly, it does not. It asks, “What are the preconditions of intelligibility?” Then, it examines every worldview and concludes that the Christian worldview alone remains consistent while providing such preconditions. This is not circular argument; rather, as discussed above, it takes the form of *modus tollens*. Consistent transcendental apologists do not say that the Bible is true because the Bible says it is true; instead, they argue that the Bible is true because if it were not true, then it would be impossible to make sense of anything.

Nevertheless, there is one important sense in which circularity is unavoidable, and that is with regard to the ultimate authority within any given worldview structure. If an ultimate authority tries to ground its authority in something outside of itself, then it relinquishes its status as the “ultimate” authority. On the Christian worldview, God is the ultimate authority because God says He is the ultimate authority. On the worldview of philosophical naturalists, autonomous human reason is the ultimate authority because they think it is reasonable to believe that autonomous human reason is the ultimate authority. Any attempt by naturalists to prove that reason is the final authority will result in the use of reason; therefore, the authority of reason cannot be proven but by the use of reason. Both “proofs” of ultimate authority are circles. But, this is not the transcendental argument.

As already explained, the transcendental argument is something different. It does not argue that way at all. It asks, “Does autonomous human reason provide the preconditions

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Conway, *The Elements of Reasoning*, 133.

necessary to intelligibility?” The answer, according to secular philosophy itself, is “no.”³⁸ But ask the question, “Does the God of the Bible provide the preconditions necessary to intelligibility?” The answer to this question, according to transcendental apologetics, is “yes.”

Analysis of Two Responses to The Transcendental Argument for The Existence of God It Wrongly Agues That a Worldview Must Presently Have a Justification for Meaning

Tod Billings, president of the Arkansas Society of Freethinkers, argues that the transcendental apologetic is wrong to insist that philosophical naturalism must be able to justify meaning in order to be a viable worldview. According to Atheism, many things presently remain unknown, and the fact that Atheism, unlike Christian Theism, is not willing to “guess” about what is unproven does not make Atheism an inferior worldview.³⁹ Just because no philosophical naturalist has been able to justify knowledge or morality does not mean that knowledge and morality will never be justified in that system.

Of course, this fails to grasp the severity of the problem. The transcendental argument for the existence of God does not merely say that philosophical naturalism has not justified meaning; rather, it says that philosophical naturalism cannot ever justify meaning. One of the points of a “philosophical system,” or “worldview,” is to explain and interpret reality as it is. The fact is that philosophical naturalism is incapable of even beginning to explain some of the most basic and important facets of our universe, namely, knowledge and morality. If a model fails to account for relevant data, it should be scrapped. Atheism fails as a comprehensive model to account for relevant data; therefore, it should be scrapped.

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Hume had his “gap,” and Kant had his “wall,” and both philosophers understood this. No subsequent secular philosopher has been able to demonstrate how human reason alone can establish the preconditions necessary to human existence.

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Tod Billings, *The Faulty Nature of The Transcendental Argument for The Existence of God* [on-line]; accessed 7 November 2003; available from http://www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/billings_tag.html; Internet.

It Wrongly Argues That Having a Justification for Meaning Makes a Worldview True

Billings goes on to say that the transcendental argument for the existence of God does not prove Christian theism because having an explanation for something does not make that explanation true. He recalls that Greek mythology explained why crops do not grow during certain times of the year. According to this Greek myth, a regular cycle of emotional depression among the gods causes the crops not to grow at regular intervals. This myth is an explanation, but obviously it is not a true explanation. Billings thinks this demonstrates the flaw of the transcendental apologetic. Just because the Christian worldview is able to justify reason and morality does not make it true.⁴⁰

Billings would have a point if the transcendental apologetic only sought to prove that Christianity grounds reason and morality, but that is not all the transcendental apologetic does. It argues that no other consistent worldview can ultimately ground reason and morality. The Atheist may then respond, “How do you know that a non-Christian worldview will not be discovered in the future that can justify reason and morality?” The answer to this question is that an apologist can only deal with the worldviews that already exist. But, the question does demonstrate another reason that claiming certainty for the transcendental argument is not very helpful. Exhaustive knowledge of every possible worldview would be required to refute every possible worldview. Nevertheless, given the lack of novelty among worldviews throughout the history of the world, it seems highly improbable that any worldview will ever arise besides Christianity (and pre-Christian Judaism) that can adequately account for meaning. Hence, this objection also fails.

Conclusion

American society is consistently following philosophical naturalism to its logical conclusion: meaninglessness and irrationality. But, no society can consistently operate on these

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Billings, *The Faulty Nature*.

values. Indeed American society is schizophrenic, absolutely insisting that there are no absolutes, and championing the right of individuals to chart their own courses, while condemning terrorists who do just that. All of this proves that no one can be a consistent philosophical naturalist. No one can run from the image of God stamped upon each one of us. If it is impossible to be a consistent philosophical naturalist, then perhaps the error lies in philosophical naturalism itself. But, if philosophical naturalism is not true, then what is true? The transcendental argument for the existence of God demonstrates that biblical Christian theism alone can ground the universal human application of reason and moral norms. In the end, only God can convert a human heart, and in a sense, the transcendental argument is simply a sermon. Believe in the God of Scripture and you will understand! Abandon the idol of your mind and subject it to the mind of the God revealed in Sacred Scripture and you will see!

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