

FORT BEND CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

THE GREAT DEBATE

AND

THE TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Although the Transcendental Argument for God's existence has been conceptually profound, it can be advanced to have a more significant practical impact. Thus, it is necessary to critique prior attempts and reformulate a more effective presentation.

Unlike traditional apologetics, such as the Cosmological and the Teleological arguments, presuppositional apologetics and the Transcendental Argument for God's existence (TAG) takes a different approach and sets out to examine the rationality of the philosophical systems and worldviews themselves and their presuppositions (a person's ultimate commitment)¹. TAG proves the existence of God by showing the impossibility of the contrary. It attacks the root of the problem; the conflicting presuppositions of the theistic and atheistic world view. One must ask, "Which one allows for universal and invariant laws?" Without God, no knowledge is possible. Without God, there is no basis for man morally, religiously, and epistemologically.² Without God, man is lost.

There are laws of logic, mathematics, morality, and science that govern the universe. These laws are conceptual principles that hold true throughout the entire universe and throughout all of time. These laws are immaterial, abstract, universal, and invariant. They have always existed and are not contingent on the universe, but instead they transcend the universe. The laws are contingent on God. They reflect the nature of God's thinking. He created them and he defines them. God is unchanging; therefore, the laws are unchanging.

These laws are uniform, and yet atheists use and claim to have knowledge of them. Atheists believe that the universe is self-operating and came about by random chance. These

¹ Frame, John M., and Cornelius Van Til. *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R

² Til, Cornelius Van. *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969. 204-5

immaterial and orderly laws govern the universe, and therefore, cannot be contingent on a material and disordered universe. An atheistic worldview cannot account for universal, invariant, unchanging, and abstract laws. Therefore, atheists cannot do any deductive reasoning without borrowing from the theistic worldview. Theism can account for order because of the presupposition that there is an order-er, for there cannot be order without an order-er.

The 1985 Great Debate between Dr. Greg Bahnsen, a Christian, and Dr. Gordon Stein, an atheist, is an effective case study and a notable example of TAG used in a practical sense. After a brief look at the history of this argument through the Historical Review, this thesis will analyze Dr. Bahnsen's structure and methodical use of TAG in his argument against Dr. Stein, and evaluate his strengths and weaknesses to build upon and formulate an applicable strategy for arguing the existence of God through TAG.

HISTORICAL REVIEW

Introduction:

Many great theistic philosophers have dedicated their lives to the advancement of Christian theology and the Kingdom of God. This historical review will give a brief overview of the history behind TAG. Beginning as early as 300 years before the birth of Jesus to today, many philosophers like Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Cornelius Van Till, John Frame, and Greg Bahnsen have made significant contributions to the development of transcendental arguments.

Aristotle:

Aristotle, a Greek philosopher from 350 BCE and renowned student of Plato, laid down the foundation for all epistemological thought. He contributed to many fields of knowledge during his time, and his influence continues to affect philosophy and worldview more than 2300 years after his death. One of Aristotle's largest contributions to Judeo-Christian Theology were his laws of thought, otherwise known as the laws of logic. These universal and unchanging laws are the core foundation of TAG. The laws of logic can be summarized as follows:

1. Law of Identity: "It will not be possible to be and not to be the same thing, except in virtue of an ambiguity"³ ($A=A$). Although this law may sound simple, it is important in understanding rational thinking. It states that a thing is only the thing that it is. For example, a dog is not a cat, a dog is a dog.
2. Law of Non-contradiction: "Being is not nonbeing."⁴ (B is not non- B). It is absurd to think a dog can exist in a single point in space and time and also not exist in that same

³ Aristotle, and W. D. Ross. *Metaphysics*. Sioux Falls, SD: NuVision Publications, 2009. Book 4. p. 51

⁴ Geisler, Norman L. *Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976. p. 10

single point in space and time in the same respect. If one attempted to deny this law, they must use it in the very denial of the same law that they are using.⁵

3. Law of Excluded Middle: “It is necessary for the affirmation or the negation to be true or false.”⁶ (A is either true or false, and it cannot be both nor neither). A proposition must be true or false. For example, it is impossible for something to be a dog **and** not a dog, or neither a dog **nor** not a dog. It must be a dog **or** not a dog and nothing in between.

These laws are universal, unchanging, and transcendent of space and time. Aristotle’s laws of logic are axioms⁷ and if they did not hold true at all times and in all situations then the universe would have no order. For example, if the law of non-contradiction was not invariant, then it could be possible for the universe to both exist and not exist at the same time. He argued that these laws are the most basic truths and are necessary for understanding the universe. Aristotle stated that any counter arguments center on unanswered ambiguity, an inconsistency of what is perceived and what is truly the case, a false interpretation of identity, or a failure to fully comprehend the situation.

Immanuel Kant:

The next big development to the foundation of TAG did not come about until the 18th century with the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. He is credited with being the first to argue for the existence of God while using transcendental thinking in a logical way.

Kant rejected the skepticism of David Hume’s belief that all knowledge must come from *a posteriori*⁸ or empirical means. On the other hand, he also rejected the rationalist’s belief that

⁵ Ibid., p. 15

⁶ Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Book 4. p. 59

⁷ Axiom: a statement or proposition that is regarded as being established, accepted, or self-evidently true.

⁸ *a posteriori*: with sensory experience

all knowledge must come from *a priori*⁹ or reasonable means. So, Kant set out to find basis for knowledge such as science, mathematics, and logic through transcendental thinking. The question of whether knowledge is possible or not was irrelevant, otherwise there would be no point in the discussion of knowledge. He instead asked what conditions allowed for knowledge. What would the universe have to be like if human reasoning was possible? This universe would have to allow for universal and transcendent laws that governed the universe, otherwise knowledge would be impossible. Kant is credited with the idea of neutral contingency. One must establish a point of possibility that both philosophers in the debate or discussion agree on, and try to prove that the point of contingency is impossible unless the point of debate is true. Kant explained, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, transcendental logic and the difference between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge. He believed that there are two places in the mind that knowledge springs from: intuition (power of receiving representations) and conception (power of cognizing by means of those representations). Kant argued that although most knowledge and logic is *a posteriori*, there are certain *a priori* axioms for which all other knowledge can be based on.¹⁰

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant refuted Hume's skepticism about the deducibility of *a priori* metaphysical concepts through his Transcendental Deduction. He targeted the skepticism of external objects in his Refutation of Idealism. In this, he argues that one could not have knowledge of a material object if he or she had never come in contact with a material object before. This knowledge must be gained through sense experience. In his Transcendental Deduction, Kant agreed with Hume's belief that there is no empirical way to prove anything

⁹ *a priori*: without sensory experience

¹⁰ Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2010. p. 43

using *a priori* reasoning. He argued that some things could be proven transcendently, like space and time. “Space is not a conception which has been derived from outward experiences.”¹¹ Space cannot be represented from relations of external experiences. If not external experience, then space has to be represented through *a priori*, which acts as the foundation of all intuitions. Space is represented as an infinite given quantity, for every thought must be considered as a representation. Kant believed that space is pure intuition and not a conception. Kant also believed that time is *a priori* and is not an empirical conception. “Time is the formal condition *a priori* of all phenomena whatsoever. Space, as the pure form of external intuition, is limited as a condition *a priori* to external phenomena alone.”¹² Therefore, all representations are of man’s internal state, whether they have external things for their objects or not.

There cannot be just *a priori* knowledge or just *a posteriori* knowledge. Man gains knowledge both empirically and rationally. Kant’s transcendental method shows that things can be proven by sensory experience or reason, and that those things can be proven true by being preconditions for the existence of things that exist. This idea plays a large part in the effectiveness of a syllogism¹³ as a proof to an argument. In the modern day Transcendental Argument, one is trying to prove that God is the prerequisite for all knowledge, both empirical and rational. Kant contributes to TAG by stating that there are absolute and invariant principles that neither have exceptions nor excuses.

Cornelius Van Til:

Cornelius Van Til, a 20th century philosopher and presuppositional apologists, had arguably the most significant influence on modern day TAG. Although the laws of logic and

¹¹ Ibid., p. 45

¹² Ibid., p. 51

¹³ Syllogism: a form of reasoning in which a conclusion is drawn from two or more given premises. (e.g., This animal is a dog; all dogs have four legs; therefore this animal has four legs).

transcendental thinking go as far back as Aristotle and Kant, Van Til pioneered the Transcendental Method. This method presupposes that authentic knowledge is achievable instead of trying to prove its existence. Van Til believed that outside of the Christian worldview, there is no basis of knowledge. This means that no one can argue against the existence of God because all knowledge comes from God. He explained his argument through this illustration: two men are debating the existence of air. The debate itself could not occur if air did not exist.¹⁴ A debate on the existence of God would not be able to happen if God did not exist because all knowledge comes from God.

Because of this idea, Van Til believed that there is not a middle or common ground on which Christians and non-Christians may debate. He used the Christian worldview to interpret the physical and metaphysical realms. He argued that all men, no matter what they believe, have presuppositions upon which all other knowledge is known. He believed that the only presupposition that is consistently true and practical is the presupposition of the existence of a Triune¹⁵ God and the Christian worldview. A non-believer cannot even argue one thing to be true, without borrowing from the Christian worldview. This idea is later emphasized during the Great Debate between Dr. Stein and Dr. Bahnsen when Bahnsen (Christian Worldview) stated that Stein (Atheistic Worldview) cannot use the laws of logic in his debate against the existence of God, for to even use them and claim that the laws of logic exist would be to claim that God exist.

Van Til also talked about the distinction of the type of knowledge between God and man. He believed that God's knowledge is absolute and omniscient. God knows all knowledge about both the universe and Himself. He has always known everything, meaning that He has never

¹⁴ Til, Cornelius Van. *Why I Believe in God*. Philadelphia: Committee on Christian Education, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1966. Chapter VIII.

¹⁵ Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit

gained any knowledge because He just has it. On the other end of the spectrum, man's knowledge is dependent and limited. All of man's knowledge is dependent on God, and it cannot go outside of God's knowledge. God gives knowledge to man through revelations in Scripture, and people discover knowledge through their God-given curiosity. Humans cannot know anything apart from God.¹⁶

Van Til's apologetics is largely set against a non-Christian worldview. He further demonstrated how an atheistic worldview is illogical and inconsistent when he said to the atheist, "Your logic claims to deal with eternal and changeless matters; and your facts are wholly changing things; And 'never the twain shall meet.' So you have made nonsense of your own experience."¹⁷ An atheist will deny the most obvious evidence and believe the most ridiculous accusations because of their presupposition of no God.

John Frame:

John Frame is a modern day presuppositional apologist who has written works based on Van Til's take on TAG. As a student under Van Till, Frame shares a lot of the same philosophies while formulating his own methodology. Van Til was seen as confusing and ambiguous to both those within and without the Reformed community. Consequently, Frame set out to provide works that analyzed, improved, and cleared up any ambiguities in Van Till's work.

Frame participated in a debate against the skeptic Michael Martin's Transcendental Argument for the non-existence of God (TANG). Martin attempted to use the same laws of logic that theologians use to prove the existence of God as a means of proving the non-existence of God. Frame said that a non-believer could not borrow the laws of logic because they are a part of the Christian worldview. By using the laws of logic and borrowing from the Christian

¹⁶ Til, Cornelius Van. *The Defense of the Faith*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1955. p. 59-69

¹⁷ Til. *Why I Believe in God*. Chapter VIII.

worldview, atheists are thereby saying that God exists because the laws of logic can only exist in a Christian worldview. Frame knew this and used this counterargument largely in his debate with Martin.

Frame is a strong advocate for TAG, but he argued that it is not sufficient to be the sole proof for God's existence. Frame believed that no singular argument could holistically prove the existence of God.¹⁸ For example, because TAG presupposes that genuine knowledge is possible, it does not try to prove the existence of genuine knowledge because without God there is no knowledge, there is no meaning.¹⁹ Not everyone will automatically agree to presuppose genuine knowledge so one would have to use the aid of another argument to help prove this presupposition. One might argue the existence of an uncaused causer or mention the evidence of patterns in the universe as proof of a designer to prove that God is the source of all meaning, thus relying on Aquinas' Second Way or the Teleological Argument respectively.

Frame does not think that TAG should be discarded or rejected "because it fails to prove every element of Christian theism,"²⁰ but rather TAG calls for supplementations from other arguments so that together they can prove the existence of God as a whole and determine the total system of Christian certainty, thereby providing evidence from all aspects of reality and logic. He believes that it sets a goal for apologetics. This goal is to show that God exists and that He is the source of all knowledge. He believed that it is stronger than traditional apologetics because TAG presupposes God while they only imply God. For example, if the laws of logic were in question, a traditional argument would only imply the existence of God based on the assertion or denial of these laws. If the existence of the laws were denied, then God would be

¹⁸ The author of this thesis does not share this belief. The Transcendental Argument for God's existence can stand alone and effectively prove God's existence.

¹⁹ Frame, John M. *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 1994. p. 72

²⁰ Ibid., p. 72

implied to not exist, but if the laws were asserted, then God would be implied to exist. However, in a transcendental argument, because God is presupposed, both the assertion and denial of the existence of the laws of logic prove that God exists because all knowledge and reasoning comes from God.²¹

Greg Bahnsen:

Dr. Greg Bahnsen was a student under Cornelius Van Til and learned Van Til's Transcendental Argument from Van Til himself. Although Bahnsen saw the power of this argument, he also found many shortcomings in Van Til's presentation of the argument. Because Van Til was criticized for being unorganized and hard to understand, Bahnsen dedicated the majority of his career to organizing, explaining, and strengthening Van Til's position.²²

Much misunderstanding and rejection of the argument from the church and atheists can be attributed to the fact that Van Til only focused on the theoretical and metaphysical nature of the argument rather than actually practicing his method in debate. Bahnsen stated that he wished, "Van Til had given more attention to making practical applications of his presuppositional method – to actually defending the faith against the enemy, rather than debating methodology so much within the family of faith."²³ Bahnsen sought to correct this by "taking the argument to the streets," as he put it. He spent much of his career practicing presuppositional apologetics and the Transcendental Argument. Bahnsen used presuppositional apologetics in debates against renowned atheists such as George H. Smith, Edward Tabash, and Gordon Stein.²⁴ The 1985 debate against Stein is the case study of this thesis. Bahnsen was very powerful in his use of the

²¹ Ibid., p. 72-3

²² Butler, Michael R. "The Transcendental Argument for God's Existence." The Transcendental Argument for God's Existence. Accessed November 21, 2014. <http://butler-harris.org/tag/>.

²³ Bahnsen, Greg L. *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 1998. p. xviii n.4

²⁴ Butler, Michael R. "The Transcendental Argument for God's Existence." The Transcendental Argument for God's Existence. Accessed November 21, 2014. <http://butler-harris.org/tag/>.

Transcendental Argument and showed just how dominant presuppositional apologetics can be in a practical sense.

Van Til was criticized for a lack of Biblical exegesis in his writings on TAG. Bahnsen addressed this problem and did the Biblical exegesis himself. Not only did he show there was Scriptural validity in TAG, but also that the Bible demonstrates that it is necessary to prove the existence of God through a presuppositional apologetic-type argument. Through Bahnsen's exegesis, he looked at apologetics being used in the New Testament. For example, Bahnsen showed how the Apostle Paul argued in Paul's own writings. Paul believed that apart from Christ no knowledge could be attained because God is the foundation of all knowledge.²⁵ Paul actually used a presuppositional argument to defend his faith.

Many people had a hard time understanding TAG and presuppositional apologetics from Van Til because his writing was so unclear and obscure. Because he was a poor writer, Bahnsen wrote *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*, in which he corrected Van Til's mistakes. In this, Bahnsen logically organized and defended Van Til's thoughts and presented them in such a way that people could finally understand. Bahnsen guides the reader through some of Van Til's works and provides supportive commentary to aid in the understanding of Van Til's ideas through the use of footnotes.²⁶

Van Til's critiques found an apparent contradiction in his philosophy. His presuppositional system claims that non-believers both believe and do not believe that God exists. The non-believer believes that God is the all-powerful, personal, and perfect being but at the same time, the non-believer does not believe that God is the all-powerful, personal, and perfect being. This seems like a contradiction and has received its share of criticism. Van Til

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

argued that the non-believers are engaging in self-deception. They truly believe that God exists yet they suppress that belief and lie to themselves. The non-believer convinces himself/herself that God does not exist. Bahnsen addresses the phenomenon of self-deception in his dissertation “A Conditional Resolution of the Apparent Paradox of Self-Deception.” Here, he explained how it is possible for one to truly believe that God exists yet deceive himself/herself to believe the contrary. He argued that the self-deception is intentional, but when the self-deception is successfully achieved, the original intention is covered up and forgotten.²⁷

Thanks to Bahnsen’s efforts, Van Til’s presuppositional apologetics and TAG are more clearly understood. Through a thorough analysis and defense, Bahnsen complimented Van Til’s disorganized and theoretical system with transparency and practical illustrations.

²⁷ Ibid.

ANALYSIS AND REVIEW OF THE GREAT DEBATE

The 1985 Great Debate between Dr. Greg Bahnsen, a Christian, and Dr. Gordon Stein, an atheist, is an effective case study and notable example of TAG used in a practical sense. This section of the thesis will analyze Bahnsen's structure and methodical use of TAG in his argument against Stein, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses to build upon and formulate an applicable strategy of arguing the existence of God through TAG.

The Question in Debate: Does God exist?

SEGMENT ONE

Bahnsen's Opening Statement

At the start of the debate, Bahnsen sought to clear any ambiguities before he began his actual argument. By establishing clarity, he hoped that less time would be spent on little nuances like definitions, and that more time would be spent on actual arguments. The question under debate between Dr. Bahnsen and Dr. Stein was "Does God exist?" Bahnsen knew that the word "God" could be interpreted in many ways so he made it clear that he was arguing in favor of Christian Theism.²⁸ "My commitment is to the Triune God and the Christian worldview based on God's revelation in the Old and New Testaments."²⁹ This automatic exclusion of all other religions put a heavy burden on Bahnsen. He skipped a step and instead of trying to prove that a god exists, he tried to prove that the Christian God exists and that He is the one true God.

He also made it clear that in the debate they would be discussing the rationality or irrationality of atheism and Christian theism as philosophical systems and not the success or

²⁸ Although Bahnsen states that he is arguing strictly for the Triune God, he does not adequately conclude that the God he is trying to prove can solely be applicable to the Triune God. This will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis.

²⁹ Bahnsen, Greg. *The Great Debate*. Irvine: University of California, 1985.

characteristics of the people that follow them.³⁰ Bahnsen defended Christian theism as a philosophical system because this would force Stein to adopt the presuppositions of the Christian worldview if he wanted to show the irrationality in the Christian worldview. Bahnsen admitted that both Christian and Atheists alike can be arrogant, rude, and intolerable in their approaches, and that both have been the cause of problems like the Reign of Terror and the Spanish Inquisition. Again, he stated that they are not debating which worldview or system brings inner peace or satisfaction to their followers, but rather if the worldviews or systems are objectively true.

Lastly, before he started his argument, he gave credit to Dr. Stein in the area of his dissertation. Unfortunately for Stein, his expertise was in the maturation of Japanese whales. Bahnsen only mentioned this to show the audience that Stein is not qualified in the field of philosophy and had no reason to be in the debate. After he cleared a few ambiguities and set the stage, Bahnsen revealed his argument. His opening case for God's existence consisted of three major parts: the nature of evidence, the presuppositional conflict of worldviews, and TAG.

The nature of evidence is the difference in how one argues and the types of evidence one uses to answer the question at hand. Stein had previously compared the question of the existence of God to all other factual questions, implying that all factual questions are answered in the same way and with the same type of evidence. By reducing the question of God's existence to the same as any other simple factual question, Stein committed a logical fallacy. When proving the existence of different entities, one does not go about answering these questions in the same way or with the same evidence. Bahnsen asked the question, "Is there a box of crackers in the

³⁰ If the reader of this thesis would like to know more about the cultural impact and success of people who adhere to the Christian philosophical system, refer to Sommer Hayes' thesis.

pantry?”³¹ One might go about answering this question by walking into the pantry and looking for the crackers. Proving the existence of these crackers is vastly different than proving the existence of radiation or gravity. Bahnsen called this logical fallacy the “Crackers in the Pantry” fallacy. The kind of evidence and arguments one uses when answering the question of God’s existence is determined by the metaphysical nature of God and one’s presuppositional worldview.

Dr. Bahnsen pointed out yet another logical fallacy in Dr. Stein’s reasoning. Stein believed when answering a question, one must look at logic, facts, and reason. These three terms are vague and could be interpreted in different ways. Bahnsen called this error in thinking the “Pretend Neutrality” fallacy. To further examine his errors, he quoted Stein, ““The use of logic or reason is the only valid way to examine the truth or falsity of any statement which claims to be factual.”³² A problem arises when evaluating the truth or falsity of the very claim itself. Bahnsen showed that if Stein wanted to prove this statement true, he would have to use logic and reason because according to the statement, these two things are the only way to prove the factuality of a statement. This would be begging the question³³. If Stein tried to prove it any other way, the statement would be false because he would not be using the two evidences allowed: logic and reason.

Stein relied on a presupposition as a basis for knowledge. In Bahnsen’s own words, “It is not something that he has proven by empirical experience or logic, but rather, it is that by which he proceeds to prove everything else.”³⁴ Bahnsen admitted that even he has presuppositions; in fact everyone has presuppositions on which they base their worldviews that form the foundation

³¹ Bahnsen. *The Great Debate*. 1985.

³² Ibid.

³³ A logical fallacy and type of circular reasoning that assumes the conclusion at the initial premise of the argument that is trying to prove the conclusion.

³⁴ Bahnsen. *The Great Debate*. 1985.

to know and reason everything else. Because of Stein's presuppositions, he will disallow any evidence for the existence of God because they will not stand in his worldview. The same thing happens with Christians arguing from the theistic worldview. Bahnsen believed there was "no shortage of empirical indicators or evidences of God's existence"³⁵ and His wisdom, power, and glory. Evidence such as the sophistications of the human body, the solar system, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, miracles, special revelation, and the Bible³⁶; but Stein discounted all of these because his worldview based on his presuppositions do not allow for these things. His worldview does not allow for the supernatural. His presuppositions establish his worldview. All philosophical systems and worldviews must rely on a presupposition. "At the most fundamental level of everyone's thinking and beliefs there are primary convictions. Convictions about which all other experience is organized, interpreted, and applied."³⁷ No one is presuppositionally neutral.

The presuppositional conflict in worldviews between atheists and theists results in the difference in the type of evidence and the way one evaluates that evidence based upon their worldview. From here, it seems that a debate between opposing presuppositional worldviews is not possible, but that is not the case. As Bahnsen pointed out, Dr. Stein's "cracker in the pantry" fallacy and the "pretend neutrality" fallacy erroneously assume that the question of the existence of God could be answered like any other factual question. The question of God's existence cannot be answered this way for two reasons. First, metaphysically: God is non-natural unlike other material entities, and second, epistemologically: the presuppositional character of the argument. Because the question of God's existence cannot be answered like any other natural

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The use of special revelation, faith, and the Bible are not effective in a debate against an atheist. This issue will be discussed later.

³⁷ Bahnsen. *The Great Debate*. 1985.

question, one must compare the conflicting worldviews themselves to see if they even allow for the ability to use logic and reason.

Dr. Bahnsen argued that the debate “must engage in transcendental argumentation: the only kind that ultimately deals with skepticism, the foundations of science and logic, and the question of epistemological certainty.”³⁸ He suggested proving God’s existence through the impossibility of the alternative. Through the use of a presuppositional argument, Bahnsen revealed TAG by stating that without God it is impossible to prove anything. Without a worldview of the presupposition of a god no logical reasoning is possible, therefore no knowledge is possible. Bahnsen argued that within an atheistic worldview that is both irrational and without order, atheists cannot account for things of uniformity and universality. An atheistic worldview cannot account for things such as the laws of logic, moral absolutes, and the uniformity of nature.

Dr. Bahnsen prepared and presented his argument in a very strategic manner. By clearing any ambiguities and defining his terms, he wiped the slate clean for a fresh start. Next, by ordering his argument in the way that he did, everything fell into place for the big reveal at the end. He explained the Nature of Evidence (the question God’s existence is different than a natural factual question). He showed the presuppositional conflict of worldviews (all reasoning uses presuppositions and no one is neutral). And finally, he revealed the Transcendental Proof for God’s existence (without Him it is impossible to prove anything). In an atheistic worldview, there is no possibility for things that are abstract, universal, immaterial, and unchanging. When Dr. Stein tried to use the laws of thought or any type of reasoning in general, he was borrowing from the theistic worldview.

Stein’s Opening Statement

³⁸ Ibid.

From the onset of the debate, the audience could tell that Dr. Stein was unprepared for what Dr. Bahnsen threw at him. The Presuppositional apologetics of TAG was unlike older Thomistic³⁹ apologetics such as the Cosmological and Teleological argument in their way of arguing. Stein's ill-equipped and nervous demeanor was evident throughout the entire debate.

Stein granted expertise to Bahnsen's dissertation on self-deception and claimed that it would not be helpful in the debate just as his was not. He admits the significance of the question at hand saying, "If God doesn't exist, then the Bible is not the Word of God, Jesus can't be the Messiah, and Christianity can't be true."⁴⁰ Stein repeated his statement that the existence of God is a factual question and can be answered by logic, reason, and evidence. He also claimed that Bahnsen has misrepresented atheism, and from here, he defined his terms: atheism, God, and the Burden of Proof.

Stein claimed that atheists do not say they can prove that God does not exist or that they deny His existence, but rather that they have looked at the evidence and found it insufficient to prove that God exists. The existence of God is "unproved not disproved," or unproven until proven. From here he shifted the burden of proof onto the theists. He said it is really difficult for one to prove that something does not exist universally, but much easier in comparison to prove something does exist. Stein gave an illustration by trying to prove that unicorns exist. He can look in the room and say that in that room there are no unicorns, but in order to prove that they universally do not exist he has to search the entire universe at one moment in time. Even then he could only say that the unicorn did not exist at that moment in time. It is much easier for a theist to find positive evidence for God's existence, than it is for an atheist to find negative evidence

³⁹ This refers to Thomas Aquinas and the philosophy he used in his arguments. These types of arguments are known as "traditional" or "classic" apologetics and assume a common ground between a Christian and a non-Christian and build from there.

⁴⁰ Bahnsen. *The Great Debate*. 1985.

for God's existence. Therefore, since it is impossible to prove a universal negative, the burden of proof is on the theist.⁴¹

Not only did Stein redefine atheism, he redefined God, from Bahnsen's definition. Stein rejected his definition and said that he will be arguing against all gods or God in general. He gave his definition, agreed upon by an atheist and a theist in a former debate, as "a supreme personal being, distinct from the world, and Creator of the world."⁴² Stein went on to give eleven basic, theistic proofs that have been formulated over the past 900 years. This thesis will not go into detail on each argument that Stein presented and then attempted to refute, but the eleven proofs for God's existence that Stein presented were: the First Cause (Cosmological) Argument, the Design (Teleological) Argument, Argument from Life, Argument from Revealed Theology, Argument from Miracles, Ontological Argument, Moral Argument, Wish Argument, Argument from Faith, Argument from Religious Experience, and Pascal's Wager.

Due to the time restraints of the debate, Stein oversimplified many of the arguments, allowing him to superficially refute them. He also mentioned arguments that Bahnsen would join Stein in invalidating such as the Wish Argument⁴³ and the Argument from Revealed Theology.⁴⁴ Stein mentioned all of these arguments, but Stein did not mention the only argument that Bahnsen used which was TAG.

In Stein's opening statement, he ignored Bahnsen's definition of both God and atheism and redefined them to shift the burden of proof onto the theist. He gave eleven arguments for God's existence, but failed to mention TAG, ultimately trying to distract Bahnsen from it, or maybe Stein just did not understand the argument being presented to him.

⁴¹ When atheism is defined this way, Stein sounds very convincing, but as Dr. Bahnsen later points out, this is not the traditional definition of atheism and even Stein reverts back to the traditional definition later on in the debate.

⁴² Bahnsen. *The Great Debate*. 1985.

⁴³ With no God there would be no reason for humans to live. Most people believe in Him so He must exist.

⁴⁴ The Bible is the word of God. The Bible said that God exist, therefore God exist.

First Cross Examination

First, Dr. Bahnsen cross-examines Dr. Stein. He asked him if he had any sources that agree with his atheist definition of “unproved not disproved.” Stein began to read a quote from a source but Bahnsen cut him off saying it was not necessary. He asked for any others and again Stein began to read a quote and again Bahnsen cuts him off before he could read it. Bahnsen then asked Stein whether he heard Bahnsen use the Argument from Revealed Theology. Stein said no but that he assumed the conclusion from that argument. Bahnsen immediately went on the offensive and said, “I didn't ask you what I assumed, I asked you if I used that argument.”⁴⁵ Bahnsen then asked why Stein did not bring up TAG when mentioning the other eleven arguments. Stein responded by saying he did not believe that TAG could be considered a proof. Stein's answer to Bahnsen's next question gave the momentum to Bahnsen and shifted the entire debate.

Bahnsen asked, “Do you believe there are laws of logic then?” To which Stein replied, “Absolutely.”⁴⁶ This was the exact response Bahnsen wanted. Stein believed that the laws of logics are laws of thought that are interpreted by man and agreed upon by humans. He believed that they are mere conventions that are self-verifying. And finally, before Stein got his turn at asking Bahnsen questions, Bahnsen asked if these laws were material. To which Stein reluctantly replied, “No, they are not material.”

Now it was Stein's turn to do the questioning, and he was ready. From the tone of his voice, he believed there was power in his next question and that he had Bahnsen right where he wanted him. Stein asked for any other examples of something immaterial, apart from God. To this, Bahnsen quickly and confidently responded, “the laws of logic.” The crowd erupted in

⁴⁵ Bahnsen. *The Great Debate*. 1985.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

laughter, so much so that the moderator of the debate had to call for silence. Stein tried to recover by accusing Bahnsen of equating God to the laws of logic. This backfired. Bahnsen said that only someone who thinks that all factual questions are answered in the same way would believe that all immaterial things are equal. Stein claimed that he assumed Bahnsen was equating them by saying God is a convention because the laws of logic are a convention. Bahnsen did not hold the claim that the laws of logic are convention so that point was irrelevant.

Stein quickly diverted to ask Bahnsen if there is a tri-Omni contradiction with the theistic God. He asks this so he could set up the problem of evil argument⁴⁷ later in the debate. Stein then asks Bahnsen what it would take to relinquish his faith in God. Bahnsen shows that this is an invalid question, because one cannot prove that there are NO arguments that can prove the existence of God because one cannot show a universal negative. However, Bahnsen did say that if there was no basis for his faith he would not believe in God. Stein then asked how Bahnsen knew that God was good. Bahnsen seemed to struggle with this one. He started off weak by using personal revelations, but then saved himself by saying those arguments will not work outside his worldview so he will not use them in an argument with someone who does not share the same worldview as him. He then said a presupposition of the theistic worldview is that, “What God says to be good is good, because it reflects his own character. God is good and is the standard of goodness.”⁴⁸ Because God is the standard of goodness, he defines good just like he defines the laws of logic.

Stein asked if the knowledge of God being good was presupposed or something that God told him as evidenced in this world. Bahnsen said that there are many things that are both presupposed and evidenced in this world, like the laws of logic. Stein briefly brought up other

⁴⁷ This atheistic argument ask, “If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, why is there evil in the world?”

⁴⁸ Bahnsen. *The Great Debate*. 1985.

immaterial things like souls, and asked Bahnsen to prove their existence. He said the nature of man and the soul are revealed in the Bible, God's word. To which Stein accused him of circular reasoning. It looked as if Bahnsen could not sufficiently argue the soul's existence at this point so he backed away and reverted back to the actual topic of debate, the question of God's existence.

When Bahnsen was examining Stein, he was very aggressive and would cut off Stein if he was taking too long to answer. He brought back up TAG and laws of logic and asked questions that would set Stein up to answer in ways Bahnsen could easily rebut. When Stein was examining Bahnsen, Stein seemed nervous and caught off guard. If Stein would have stood his ground on a few points, like proving the existence of the soul, Stein may have cornered Bahnsen. Without a doubt, Bahnsen won the first cross-examination.

Bahnsen's First Rebuttal

Dr. Bahnsen denied Dr. Stein's definition of God in his opening statement and called it useless. Because Bahnsen said that he was arguing for the Christian God and the Christian God alone, anything that Stein would use that did not fit with the Christian view of God, Bahnsen would ignore. Bahnsen also disagreed with Stein's untraditional definition of atheism. By changing the definition, Stein had minimized the burden and responsibility of the atheist. From Stein's definition, an atheist only has to prove that theistic proofs and their evidences are inadequate instead of having to actually disprove the existence of God. Stein claimed that the laws of logic are universal but conventional in nature. Bahnsen argued that this was a contradiction, for if they were conventional in nature then it is possible that they could be different in different societies. One society might say that you are allowed to contradict yourself, while another one does not. The laws of logic cannot be conventional because if they were then

the laws would not be universal. If the laws were not universal then man could not logically reason and science and math would not work.

Bahnsen reiterated TAG and called Stein out for not addressing the question he asked. The laws of logic have a transcendent necessity about them because they are neither conventional nor sociological in nature. According to Bahnsen, the laws are not proven to be true through experience because they are universal. No one has universal experience, so they cannot be proven this way. He claimed that the laws are abstract and not material in nature. For if the laws of logic were materialistic, they would lose their law-like nature, something Stein agreed with in the first cross-examination. As Bahnsen argues, in a materialistic worldview and in an atheistic worldview, the universe is constantly changing. This constant change could not account for laws that are invariant. For the laws to stay invariant and never change, the laws of logic and the laws of nature would have to transcend the universe. Bahnsen told Stein that if he wanted to use the laws of logic in the debate, he would first have to show how an atheistic worldview could account for these laws⁴⁹. TAG sets out to prove the existence of God through the impossibility of the contrary.

The laws of logic are transcendental, invariant, universal, and immaterial. He shifted the burden of proof onto the atheists and asked how he can account for these types of transcendent laws in an atheistic worldview. In a theistic worldview, the existence of laws makes sense, but in an atheistic worldview, where there is no order, they do not and cannot make sense. Stein cannot use the laws of logic in debate because it would be borrowing from the theistic worldview.

Without a worldview in which God exists, it is impossible to prove anything.

Stein's First Rebuttal

⁴⁹ TAG has gained criticism because critics say that the Christians are avoiding the argument of the existence of God by asking how an atheistic worldview can account for universal laws. The proof does not prove God's existence directly, but instead takes a presuppositional approach. This will address this later in the thesis.

At first, Dr. Stein tried to avoid TAG and the question that Bahnsen proposed, and he pretended as if he was arguing against the more traditional Cosmological and Teleological arguments. “Rather than asking, ‘what is the cause of the universe,’ we must first ask ‘does the universe require a causal explanation?’ Rather than asking ‘what is responsible for the design in nature,’ we must ask ‘does nature exhibit design?’”⁵⁰ Considering that these arguments are not the topic of debate in Bahnsen’s argument or in this thesis, only a brief amount of time will be spent on them.⁵¹

Stein argued that when asking the question of how the universe was created, to answer “God” is not adequate. Saying, “an unknowable being created the universe in an unknowable way” is just saying one can’t explain it, and is effectively not saying anything at all. Stein called this a non-statement, meaning that because there was no real meaning or significance in the statement, it is as if nothing was said at all.

Stein then attempted to account for laws of science in an atheistic worldview. He defined a scientific law as “an observation that is made over and over and over again.”⁵² The laws of logic, as Stein puts it, are conventions based on repeated observations. He gave the example of the laws of mathematics. The laws of mathematics are understood enough to allow people to predict the path of a cannon ball before it is launched. Stein explains how men observe the laws and discover them in nature, and he claims that the laws are conventions that are self-verifying. Stein attributed the regularity of matter (the inherent property of matter) to the order, logic, and rationality of the universe. He believed that the inherent property of matter is the reason why the universe has scientific laws.

⁵⁰ Bahnsen. *The Great Debate*. 1985.

⁵¹ If the reader would like to know more about the Cosmological or Teleological arguments, refer to Ally Peter’s and Katie Dibble’s theses, respectively.

⁵² Bahnsen. *The Great Debate*. 1985.

Stein claimed that God is not necessary to have laws of nature; in fact, if there were a god, it would be possible to have an irrational god. An irrational god means that he could change his mind and change the laws. If the laws changed, there would be no science, mathematics, or any type of reasoning. Stein went on to talk about miracles or supernatural events. According to skeptic, David Hume, when there is a miraculous or very unlikely event, one needs extraordinary evidentiary support. One would need more evidence than normal because the event is out of the ordinary. He gave the example of the sun. If one were to say the sun is going to rise tomorrow, one would not have to provide much evidence to back the claim, but if one were to say the sun is not going to rise tomorrow, then he/she would have to give significant evidence before anyone would believe him/her.

Even though Bahnsen gave sufficient evidence that the laws of logic are not conventions, Stein still spent most of his first rebuttal claiming that they are in fact conventions. He did not really address TAG head on; instead he dismissed it and called it “nonsense” and “wishful thinking” without giving any evidence to back it up. The closest he came to addressing the question of how an atheistic worldview can account for universal and invariant laws was his claim that the inherent property of matter allows for a universe that is logical and rational.

SEGMENT TWO

Stein's Second Opening Statement

In Dr. Stein's opening statement for segment two, he presented the problem of religious diversity and the lack of success of Christianity as a philosophical system, but the argument he most heavily emphasized was the problem of evil. He was careful in his wording when he called these arguments “evidence” instead of “proofs.” According to his definition of atheism, these

“evidences” add to the probability that God does not exist, instead of taking on the burden of trying to prove that God does not exist.

The problem of evil: how can there be evil in the world when there is a God that is all knowing, all powerful, and all good? This seems like a contradiction, or at least Stein thought so. Since God is all good, He would not want evil, and since God is all powerful, then He is capable of ridding the world of that evil. This poses an interesting question for Christians. Why is there evil in the world? Some argue that there is evil because God gave humans free will and men are born with an inherently sinful nature, but Stein reasoned that if He is God and He can do anything, then why did He not make humans that could examine the situation and always choose the good? Most Christians would instantly answer this question by blaming evil on Original Sin. Because of this sin, God punished mankind, which resulted in the Fall of Man. Stein refuted saying, “Any God that would punish a man for what his ancestors did is not a very moral God.” These are some of the many interesting questions that Christians sometimes struggle answering. Unfortunately, the origin and problem of evil are not the focus of this thesis.⁵³

Stein claimed there is not physical evidence of God. He asked if God wanted everyone to believe in Him then why doesn't He make Himself known? Then only a fool would not believe in God. Well, God wants humanity to have faith, but then why did God give humans the power of reason. Stein brought up the problem of religious diversity. There are many different religions in the world. Why would God allow this? Also if one claimed that all religions except for one are false, why not take the next step and say that that one religion is also false like the others. Stein asked why there seem to be so many Christians on the streets and in organized crime. “In fact studies of the religious beliefs of prisoners have shown that almost all are devout Christians.”^{54 55}

⁵³ If the reader would like to know more about the origin and problem of evil, refer to Zach Richard's thesis.

⁵⁴ Bahnsen. *The Great Debate*. 1985.

Through his claims and statistics, Stein was suggesting that the Christian system is not a practical system for mankind to adhere to. Whether this statement has truth or not is not the question in the debate. As Bahnsen stated at the beginning of the debate, the debate should focus on the rationality and logic of the philosophical systems and worldviews themselves and not the people that adhere to them, or their pragmatic value.

Dr. Stein asked a multitude of open-ended questions for Bahnsen to respond to, but his most evident and strongest point was the problem of evil. As Stein would put it, these are not so much “proofs” but instead “evidences” that increase the probability that God does not exist.

Bahnsen’s Second Opening Statement

In Dr. Bahnsen’s Second Opening Statement, he claimed that the laws of logic are justified in a Christian worldview because they reflect the thinking of God. They are justified in a theistic worldview but what about in an atheistic worldview? Stein claimed that the laws of logic are just a matter of consensus and are just this way. This is not acceptable at all. Bahnsen presented two ways atheists attempt to justify the laws: *a priori* and *a posteriori*.

An atheist might take an *a priori* approach that is apart from experience. They might say that the laws of logic are self-verified. If so, how could they be universal and unchanging in a contingent universe of experience? One cannot prove the existence of the laws of logic by showing that they can make accurate predictions with them. The laws are conceptual in nature rather than empirical, where one can predict things through past experiences. Then “why is it that they apply repeatedly in a contingent realm of experience?”⁵⁶ The laws would not be able to repeatedly make accurate predictions if the universe was random and irrational. Stein claimed that they are conventions, but that does not help justify them. In fact, it does the opposite. If laws

⁵⁵ This statistic is misleading and could be due to the fact that the criminals are converted to Christianity after they are incarcerated.

⁵⁶ Bahnsen. *The Great Debate*. 1985.

of thought were conventional, then history, science, and mathematics would be approached in different ways all around the world.

Well, since justification through an *a priori* approach did not work, the atheist might attempt justification through an *a posteriori* approach. In other words, an atheist might try to justify the laws of logic in an atheistic worldview through experiences. “People will say we gain confidence in the laws of logic through repeated experience, then that experience is generalized.”⁵⁷ If the reality of laws of logic cannot be established or justified free from experience, then they become contingent on experience. If they are contingent on experience, then one could say they apply only to past experiences, and they lose their invariance and necessity. If the laws of logic are contingent on experience, then they lose their law-like nature.

If those two ways of justification are unsatisfactory, then one might say that the laws of logic are “linguistic conventions about certain symbols.”⁵⁸ This means that humans impose their necessity in language. By saying they are linguistic conventions would be equating them to the laws of grammar, and like the laws of grammar they would only be culturally relative. These laws would not be so useful in the universe if they were mere conventions.

Stein talked about the presence of Christians in organized crime and Christians doing these immoral things, but on what moral standard is he basing the actions of these people? There are no laws of morality or even laws in general in the materialistic universe of the atheistic worldview. Bahnsen restates that an atheist cannot account for absolute truth and laws. If he uses the laws of logic, he is borrowing from the theistic worldview.

Second Cross Examination

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Stein went first this time and cross-examined Bahnsen. He asked if math was atheistic or theistic. Bahnsen stated that the foundation of mathematics is theistic because of the impossibility of the contrary. He said that no other worldview but the theistic worldview could support laws of logic or mathematics because of their invariant, universal, and abstract qualities.

Stein asked how Bahnsen knew that the laws of logic reflect the thinking of God. Bahnsen answered by saying that God revealed this knowledge in the Old and New Testament. He knew that the laws of logic are abstract, immaterial, and universal because these are the qualities of God's thinking. That is why the laws of logic are the way that they are. In the theistic worldview, humans can metaphysically understand entities that are unchanging and abstract. It makes sense in a theistic worldview but not in an atheist's.

The cross examination shifted gears and then it was Bahnsen's turn to cross-examine Stein. Bahnsen's first question was directed toward Stein's reading repertoire. He asked him if he had ever read skeptic, David Hume's, "The Uniformity of Nature." Stein responded, with a nervous yes, saying he had read it many years prior, and was shaky on the details. Bahnsen stated, "The validity of Scientific Laws were undermined by Hume when he contended that we have no rational basis for expecting the future to be like the past... in which case Science is based simply on convention or habits of thought."⁵⁹ Stein did not agree with Hume on this point, but stated that Hume was right about many other things.

At the request of Bahnsen, Stein explained the Uniformity of Nature. The Uniformity of Nature says that matter behaves in a certain way. So, based on past observations one can predict things to happen the same way in the future as they did in the past. Matter has certain properties, which it consistently exhibits. In other words, scientists have looked at past observations and generalized them so they could make predictions.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

One thing Bahnsen needed to explain better when Stein cross-examined him was how he knew the nature of God. Bahnsen could not effectively use personal revelations or the Bible in his answer. While these evidences might be sufficient from a Christian perspective and in a Christian worldview, they are not useful when debating an atheist. He needed to use reason.

Stein's Second Rebuttal

Stein believed that Bahnsen was trying to use the laws of logic as a ploy and trap him. In his paranoia, he claimed that there is no explanation for the laws of logic and that Bahnsen knew this, which is why Bahnsen was persistent in asking for an explanation on the laws of logic. Stein claimed Bahnsen had yet to provide an explanation of the laws of logic. Stein admitted that Bahnsen had said that the laws reflect the thinking of God, but Stein does not believe that this is an adequate answer to the question. He argues that by saying they reflect the thinking of God is a non-statement and that it does not explain anything. He believed it was merely a ploy to trap him.

Stein asked the questions “how” and “why.” How did God create the universe? Why did God create the universe? He admitted that these questions are not asked in science, but in theology these questions are appropriate. He believes that these two questions are the most meaningful and important questions one could ask. Stein believed that these questions had to be asked before moving further.

Stein then went on to play a logical game that many atheists have played before. He asked, “Can he make a stone so big he can't lift it?” or “Can God make a square circle?” This is known as the Omnipotence Paradox. Is it possible for God to make a task that He is unable to perform? If He can make a task that He is unable to perform, then He is not omnipotent. If God cannot make a task that He is unable to perform, then He is not omnipotent. This paradox

assumes the wrong type of omnipotence. Some theologians, such as Norman Geisler, argued that the term “omnipotence” does not suggest that God can do all things, but rather, that God can do anything that is logically possible according to His nature. God defines the laws of logic so it is impossible for God to break them. God is invariant but if He did change the laws of logic would change with Him because the laws are defined by the nature of God. However, God is invariant, so the laws of logic are invariant. God cannot execute logical absurdities.

Bahnsen’s Second Rebuttal

Dr. Bahnsen quoted Dr. Stein saying, “If there were no uniformity, science would be impossible.” To which Bahnsen whole-heartedly agreed! There would be no science, mathematics, morality, or any type of reasoning if there was no uniformity. So, Bahnsen asked the question again, what basis is there for uniformity in the atheistic universe? To say that the universe has always been this way, and to generalize past experiences by saying that the universe will most likely be that way in the future is absurd. One cannot use past experiences to predict the future if there is no basis for uniformity. To assume the future will be like the past is to beg the question.

Bahnsen accused Stein of disregarding the question he was being asked by calling them absurd. Bahnsen said Stein was not answering them because Stein was uncomfortable answering them and does not know the answer so he dismisses the question. Although Stein said that without these laws, science would be impossible, he did not give any valid justification for the existence of the laws of logic, the laws of science, and the laws of morality in an atheistic worldview. Even though Stein said otherwise, Bahnsen claimed that he does have justification for the existence of these laws. Bahnsen stated, “The answer is that God created the world, and this world reflects the uniformity that He imposes on it by His governing, and our thinking is to

reflect the same consistency or logical coherence that is in God's thinking.” Bahnsen said that God has revealed these things to humanity. In the atheistic worldview there is no basis for uniformity or universal and abstract entities, and because it cannot account for these things, it cannot account for the success of science.

In the last minutes of his rebuttal, Bahnsen took the time to address the problem of evil proposed in Stein’s second opening statement. In which he said that in an atheistic worldview, there is no problem of evil because there is no evil. There is no evil because there is no absolute moral standard to which one could judge between good and evil. “Evil” things might bring discomfort or pain; they cannot be evil if there is no God to set an absolute moral standard. An atheist cannot even propose the problem of evil without presupposing the theistic worldview. However, in a theistic worldview, where there is a standard of morality, there is an ostensible problem of evil. To this, Bahnsen answered, “God has a good reason for the evil that He plans or allows.”⁶⁰

SEGMENT THREE

Stein’s Closing Statement

Dr. Stein used the time for his Closing Statement as more of a rebuttal than an actual conclusion. He utilized his time to rebut two things. One, Dr. Bahnsen’s claim that there is no evil in the atheistic worldview; and two, the conventionality of logic and the predictability of matter.

First, Stein argued that evil exists in the atheistic worldview. He defined evil as that which makes the general population unhappy. He claimed that morality is a general consensus just like the laws of logic and all other laws. According to Stein, humans learn morality through teaching and the socialization process. These morals are reinforced in everyday life and the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

outliers are punished for misbehavior. Stein argued that the atheistic definition of evil is more rational than the theistic definition because to an atheist, evil is what brings unhappiness to the greatest number of people, while evil to a Christian theist is whatever God determines. Stein believed that this could lead to confusion between what is good and evil. He proposes the question, “Is organ transplant evil?”⁶¹ The Bible, God’s Word, does not say anything about this, but atheists are able to answer the question with their definition of evil.

Second, Stein continued to argue that logic is a consensus again. He argued that it has both mathematical and linguistic base. He claimed that science is, at its core, atheistic. Science recognizes that matter behaves in a consistent and therefore predictable way. Saying the future is going to be like the past is a statement based on probability. Humans have no reason to believe that the behavior of matter will change in the future; therefore, there are conventional laws that are unlikely to change.

Stein finished his closing statement stating that atheism does not leave the world a wretched and hopeless place. He claimed that atheism is taking responsibility for one’s own actions. People do good to others because they want that good to be done to them. Atheism makes the world a better place.

Bahnsen’s Closing Statement

Dr. Bahnsen started his Closing Statement by noting that Dr. Stein had called his statement irrational, but Bahnsen argued that Stein would not be able to make these claims unless there was an absolute standard of rationality. Bahnsen accused Stein of having both evaded and made fun of TAG, and never actually addressing it directly or given a straight answer as to how an atheistic worldview can account for universal, abstract, invariant laws. Bahnsen held that without God, one could not prove anything.

⁶¹ Ibid.

The atheist's materialistic and naturalistic universe has no basis for the uniformity of nature and the invariant, immaterial, and universal nature of God. Therefore, according to their presuppositions, the atheist has no basis to use logic and reason in a world where there is none. Bahnsen stated in his closing remarks that the debate assumed the use of logic and reason, or else the entire exercise would be irrational; the debate assumed the use of the laws of science so that it would be an intelligent discussion; the use of induction and causation to keep rational exchanges; and the use of a moral sense to prevent dishonestly and deception. Dr. Bahnsen concludes that therefore, Dr. Stein cannot account for the very debate itself.

At the end, Bahnsen essentially said that since God reveals himself to everyone and since they know in their heart of hearts that there is a God yet they still reject that belief, then they are fools. While they may be fools, telling someone they are a fool is a good way for them to stop listening. Bahnsen believed, as the apostle Paul said, that they “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”⁶² He was saying that people who do not believe in God are performing the art of self-deception. Interestingly enough, Dr. Bahnsen wrote his dissertation on the art of self-deception. This was the same dissertation that Dr. Stein deemed irrelevant to the debate.

He concludes with this definitive statement, “If you're going to be a rational man, a moral man, a man of science, can you do so in an atheistic universe. I say you can't.”⁶³ TAG sets out to prove that the atheistic worldview cannot account for the invariant, universal, and abstract nature of the laws of logic, mathematics, science, and morality. Therefore, from the impossibility of the contrary, God must exist.

SEGMENT FOUR

In the final segment of the debate, the audience wrote in questions for the moderator to

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

quickly sort through and present to both Dr. Bahnsen and Dr. Stein. For the structure of this segment, when one side was directed a question, they answered and the opposing side rebutted. When the question was directed to both Dr. Bahnsen and Dr. Stein, they took turns answering the question.

Question #1: “What solid evidence do you have to maintain that the Christian faith is the only true religion with a God?”

Bahnsen’s Response: All other religions are not philosophically defensible. He believed that the TAG could only conclude with the Triune God of the Christian worldview. He took Hinduism for example. The Hindu god, Brahman, is an unchanging and universal being that transcends the universe. However, the Hindu god is impersonal and all of experience and reason is an illusion, therefore it challenges reason itself. Bahnsen states that the Triune God of the Christian worldview is the only rational conclusion.

Stein’s Response: Christianity is as irrational as all other religions. Although he does not think Buddhism works as a philosophical system either, he admits that it makes psychological sense.

Question #2: “According to your definition and basis for evil, why was Hitler's Germany wrong or was it?”

Stein’s Response: Germany is a part of the Western Civilization and the morals that it promotes. He believed that since Hitler is a part of the larger society that neither he nor Germany had the license to change the consensus of an entire civilization.

Bahnsen’s Response: In an atheistic universe, Hitler and Germany did not have any moral obligation to stick to the Western Civilization’s standard of morality. Bahnsen asked why Stein believed that Hitler and Germany did not have the right to change tradition. There are no moral

absolutes to which one must adhere. Yes, according to an atheist, there might be a consensus that is generally followed, but there is no requirement or law that says one has to follow the irregular wishes of the general population in Western Society.

Question #3: “Why is there pain and evil in the world?”

Bahnsen’s Response: God governs mankind through punishment. Bahnsen claimed that there is pain and suffering because it is the consequence of man’s evil and the Original Sin. As Bahnsen argued, there is ultimately evil in the world because God planned it. However, this does not mean that God caused the Original Sin of man.

Stein’s Response: If God is all-powerful, then why didn’t he prevent the rebellion of man. Stein argued that since God does not like defiance, hence the consequences of punishment, then why would he allow it?

Question #4: “Isn’t it true that you are open to the fact that God may exist? If you haven’t examined all the evidence, then isn’t it true that you are an agnostic?”

Stein’s Response: Stein confirmed that he classifies himself as an atheist and argued that agnosticism is a subtype of atheism. He believed that there are two type of agnostic: Spencerian agnostic and the “unresolved” agnostic. The Spencerian agnostic believes that it is impossible to know anything about God, while an unresolved agnostic has not examined the evidence available and therefore has not decided on the issue.

Bahnsen’s Response: Bahnsen declared that Stein had in fact changed his definition of atheism to the traditional sense of the word as opposed to the definition he used earlier in the debate. Stein had originally defined an atheist as one who has examined the evidence and has found that proof for God’s existence is inadequate, while the traditional definition defined an atheist as one who believes that God does not exist and attempts to disprove his existence.

Question #5: “Why is it necessary for the abstract universal laws to be derived from the transcendental nature of God? Why not assume the transcendental nature of logic?”

Bahnsen’s Response: While the laws of logic have a transcendental nature about them, this does not justify their existence. Bahnsen argued that this was in fact a precondition of intelligibility. Bahnsen asked how one could have a variant and contingent universe if the laws that govern this universe are invariant and universal? Bahnsen argued that this requires a worldview in which the transcendental necessity of logic makes sense.

Stein’s Response: While Stein did not have anything to add to the question or response that was presented, he did, however, protest that atheists do not live by faith but rather confidence built on experience.

Question #6: “What for you personally would constitute adequate evidence for God’s existence?”

Stein’s Response: Stein said that if a miracle or supernatural experience happened before his eyes, then that would be a violation of the laws of nature. Stein noted that he would accept evidence that logically supported God’s existence. He was quick to also share that he had not heard any such new evidence during the debate.

Bahnsen’s Response: Bahnsen argued that a miracle or supernatural event would not convert Stein into a Christian, despite Stein’s claim. Bahnsen believed that Stein would find a naturalistic explanation that would fit inside of his worldview based on his presupposition. To be converted, one’s worldview must be changed; one’s heart must be changed.

Final Overview and Analysis

The Great Debate on the existence of God between Dr. Greg Bahnsen and Dr. Gordon Stein was one of the first illustrations of TAG being used in a practical sense.

Dr. Bahnsen's use of presuppositional apologetics in the debate was groundbreaking. Unlike traditional apologetics, such as the Cosmological and the Teleological arguments, presuppositional apologetics and TAG set out to examine the rationality of the philosophical systems and worldviews themselves and their presuppositions. An atheistic worldview cannot account for universal, invariant, unchanging, and abstract laws of logic, science, and mathematics. Bahnsen attempted to prove the existence of God by showing the impossibility of the contrary.

Dr. Stein was caught off guard as evidenced by his ill-equipped and nervous demeanor throughout the entire debate. From his opening statement, it was apparent that he had only prepared to argue against traditional apologetics. In order to make sense of any type of reasoning or logic that he wanted to use against the existence of God, he would have had to presuppose God. All knowledge comes from God, therefore without God there is no knowledge or reasoning. Throughout the debate, Stein insisted the laws of logic are conventions of men, and Bahnsen refutes his argument successfully, but Stein kept returning to the same argument. To deny the transcendent, universal, abstract, and invariant nature of the laws of logic is to deny all rationality.

Many of Stein's responses were ultimately inadequate but he did raise a few good questions that Bahnsen struggled with. Along with these questions, there were a few things that Bahnsen failed to do properly. Presuppositional apologetics can be very influential when used correctly, so these issues need to be addressed and improved upon in order to formulate and illustrate an applicable strategy to argue the existence of God through the Transcendental Argument.

DR. BAHNSEN'S MAJOR FAULTS AND PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

Although Dr. Bahnsen is widely considered to have beaten Dr. Stein in the Great Debate, his performance was not flawless, and his approach to the argument was not entirely sound. He fell short in some of his explanations and rebuttals, and Stein asked a few tough questions that Bahnsen could not answer adequately. Although the Transcendental Argument for God's existence has been conceptually profound, it can be advanced to have a more significant impact in a practical sense. Thus, it is necessary to critique prior attempts and reformulate a more effective presentation.

Dr. Bahnsen's largest flaw was his approach to the argument itself. At the beginning of the debate, Bahnsen clarified that he was arguing for the existence of the Triune God from the Christian worldview. The only evidence he gave behind the exclusion of all other religions and gods was during segment four when the moderator asked why the Christian God was the one true God. Bahnsen answered saying that all other religions are not philosophically defensible. However, from TAG, the conclusion is a God who is transcendent, abstract, invariant, universal, omnipotent, omniscience, and omnibenevolent. He argued that Hinduism is not proven through TAG because Brahman is not a personal god, but from the conclusion, a personal god was not a part of the attributes. What about Allah from the religion of Islam? He is a personal god. The answer is, it does not matter. All of this is irrelevant for this debate. In arguing for the existence of the Christian God alone, he is jumping the gun. An atheist will reject the premise that the argument is exclusive to the Christian God, just as Dr. Stein did. In taking this position, Bahnsen is skipped a major step. An atheist does not believe in a god at all, so they do not care which God is the true God. To them, this is not a valid question. Why would they make the leap from no god to a Christian God? When debating an atheist, the first step should be to prove the existence of a

god in general. He does not need to prove that HIS God exists, only that it is possible or even necessary for A God to exist. This burden of proof is much easier to satisfy. Then and only then, after convincing them that there is an all-powerful creator, could Bahnsen have debated that the Triune God is the one true God.

From Bahnsen's opening statement, not only did he give himself the burden of proving the existence of God-in general, but also that the Christian God is the one true God. On top of these, he claimed that the atheist cannot account for the laws of thought in their worldview, he claimed that he would prove that God exists from the impossibility of the contrary, and he claimed that there is always a presuppositional character of commitment for or against God's existence. His plate was already full, but because of this his burdens were overflowing. He had to prove that God-in general exists, that the Triune Christian God exists, that He can be proven from the impossibility of the alternative, that there is a presuppositional character of commitment for or against God's existence, and that the atheistic worldview cannot account for the laws of logic. He made so many assertions in his opening statement that he ultimately could not adequately defend every claim in the 2-hour debate. Nevertheless, for the magnitude of the burden that he gave himself, he did a magnificent job.

Although his presentation was effective, he gave himself too much responsibility at the onset of the debate. When debating an atheist, the first and only obligation is to prove that a god exists. This already is a tough task that many people fail to accomplish, let alone all of the tasks Bahnsen gave himself. Proving God's existence is a big undertaking and should be taken one step at a time.

How does a theist know that God is good? Stein brought this question up a few times throughout the debate, but did not push hard enough. In the first cross-examination, Stein asked

Bahnsen how he knew God was good. Bahnsen answered saying that God saved him and created him and God created the earth. God revealed his nature in the Scripture. Bahnsen admits that these are not acceptable answers to give to atheists even though he accepts it as truth. He said he could only give evidence to God's nature depending on Stein's presuppositions, turning the question back onto him. He might have been trying to avoid the question, but he did not answer it adequately. Bahnsen was on the right track, but he needed to make it clear that the nature of God being good is a necessary result of God's omnipotent and perfect nature. God is the standard of good and defines goodness. Whatever God says is good, is indeed good because it reflects his own character. This is a presupposition of the theistic worldview. Without this belief as a foundation, no other knowledge could be attained. All knowledge is built from presuppositions and everyone has them. When answering the question of God's goodness to an atheist, an effective argument will avoid personal revelations and Scripture, and go directly to God being the standard of goodness.

During the second cross-examination, Bahnsen asked for Stein's understanding of and the basis of the Uniformity of Nature. David Hume believed that science was based on conventions, just as Stein believed, and therefore, there is no logical basis for expecting the future to be like the past; Stein disagreed. Stein believed that the laws of science were conventions yet he believed that based on past observations one could predict the future. Stein said that science has a rational basis to predict the future because there are inherent properties that matter regularly exhibits. Bahnsen had Stein exactly where he set him up to be, but Bahnsen failed to capitalize. He asked Stein if Stein himself had tested every electron or read every report on electron behavior, trying to show to him that he cannot test every possible situation, therefore he couldn't logically say that the future will act like the past.

Bahnsen went the wrong route. He should have agreed with Stein that science has a logical basis for predicting the future and that matter behaves certain ways because of its inherent properties. Bahnsen should have agreed with this and said, “Exactly, Dr. Stein, but why does matter have these inherent properties and behave this way and why can science predict the future based on past experiences?” These things are possible because of laws that allow for this to be possible. In an atheistic worldview, these things would not be possible. Matter would not behave uniformly and the future could not be predicted based on past experiences because they would all be different. However, in a worldview, there are laws that allow for this. Bahnsen was trying to get to this point but he went the wrong route and it was not executed or finished effectively. The point is these things are only possible in a theistic worldview that allows for invariant and transcendent laws.

During segment four, the audience was able to ask questions. One question was asked of Bahnsen about the transcendental nature of logic: “Why is it necessary for the abstract universal laws to be derived from the transcendental nature of God? Why not assume the transcendental nature of logic?”⁶⁴ Basically, why can’t the laws of logic just exist on their own, why does logic need to be contingent on a God? Bahnsen did believe that the laws of logic were transcendent, but he also believed that they were contingent on God and could not exist on their own because transcendence is a precondition of intelligibility. While this is the answer, he failed to explain it further. In layman’s terms, in order for an entity to be transcendent and exist on its own, the entity must be able to have intelligence and a will. To have intelligence and a will, there needs to be a mind. The laws of logic do not have intelligence or a will because they do not have a mind, therefore they cannot justify themselves as being transcendent. They must have derived from something that does have intelligence and will and a mind to do so. God has all of these things;

⁶⁴ Bahnsen, Greg. *The Great Debate*. Irvine: University of California, 1985.

therefore the laws are contingent on God. In his answer to the last question, he brought up an apparent problem, “We have a contingent changing world and unchanging and invariant laws of logic. How can these two be brought together?”⁶⁵ Bahnsen simply answered this by saying that Christianity holds the answer. He never explained what this answer was; he only implied it. Also, the question above provides more questions. There is no basis to say that a physical universe should abide by laws that are conceptual. Bahnsen was implying that just the existence of the laws alone couldn’t justify and answer all of these questions. Again, the laws do not have a will or an intellect; they cannot make all of these things happen by themselves, but rather, they need an entity that has an intellect and a will. This entity is God and He uses the laws of logic, which He defines to govern His creation.

Dr. Bahnsen’s last major fault, and something that Dr. Stein actually pointed out, was his failure to explain what the laws of logic were. Stein accused Bahnsen of asking Stein to explain the laws of logic when Bahnsen said himself that there is disagreement among philosophers on what a law of logic is. Bahnsen never had time to respond to this question. However, although there is disagreement, many philosophers would turn to Aristotle’s three laws of logic. Fourth and even fifth laws of logic have been offered before, but philosophers generally stick to these three: the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, and the law of excluded middle. The laws of logic are also invariant and absolute, transcendent, not contingent on a material world, and conceptual by nature. The laws of logic are invariant and absolute because if they were not, then there would be no truth and no knowledge. The laws of logic are transcendent because they are not contingent on space, time, and human thinking. The laws of logic are not contingent on a material world because they would still exist if the universe ceased to exist. The laws of logic are conceptual by nature because logic is a process of thought. How a person thinks reflects the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

nature of that person. Thoughts that are absolutely perfect reflect an absolutely perfect mind. The laws of logic are invariant, transcendent, absolute, perfect, abstract, and not contingent on the universe, so therefore they come from a mind that is invariant, transcendent, absolute, perfect, abstract and independent. This mind is God.⁶⁶

Overall, Dr. Bahnsen did a fantastic job of presenting presuppositional apologetics and TAG. His performance is almost legendary among other presuppositional apologists and it acts as the standard on how to prove the existence of God through TAG in a practical way. It could, however, have been more effective.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

ATHEISTIC COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Since the 1985 Bahnsen-Stein debate that took presuppositional apologetics and TAG mainstream, there have been considerable criticisms and counter arguments. TAG takes a different approach to God's existence than past traditional arguments, which seems to throw people off and cause immediate rejection. While there have been counter arguments, none have been fatal to TAG.

Counter Argument 1

The laws of logic exist due to natural existence. They exist as a result of matter. The universe acts the way it does because that is how it is. The laws of logic simply exist and are axioms that are self-evident. They do not need any other explanations for their existence.⁶⁷

Response to Counter Argument 1

The laws of logic cannot exist due to natural existence because they are conceptual absolutes. They could not have come into existence as a result of the existence of matter. From this thinking the laws of logic become contingent on the universe, but this cannot be true because the laws would still exist even if the universe did not. Take, for example, the law of non-contradiction. If the universe were to cease to exist, the law of non-contradiction would still hold true because the universe cannot exist and not exist at the same time and in the same respect. To say that the laws of logic exist because they just do, or to say that they are axioms and therefore self-evident, is to beg the question. To think that they exist because they exist, and that they are self-evident because they are self-evident is unacceptable circular reasoning that does not account for their existence.

Counter Argument 2

⁶⁷ This was one of Dr. Stein's arguments in the Debate.

The laws of logic are conventions among men.⁶⁸ They are a product of the human mind and have evolved into what they are today. They are agreed upon rules that hold true in the universe. Humans can look at their past experiences and generalize a consensus of what the future will probably be like. The laws of logic are a product of the human mind or maybe even a product of the universe.

Response to Counter Argument 2

There is no basis for the consistency or uniformity of the nature of the universe or to any rational or logical thinking if the laws are mere conventions. Not all humans agree on things that are true and false, and if human minds differ in their thinking, then the logical absolutes would not be absolute. Different cultures would have different laws of logic. These laws have to be the same because they apply to the entire universe throughout all of space and time. They cannot be a product of the human mind or the universe because the laws of logic are unchanging and both the human mind and the universe are not.

Counter Argument 3

The entire argument is based on a presupposition. The theists are presupposing God in their epistemology and then using that epistemology to prove the existence of God, the very thing that they presupposed. This is circular reasoning.

Response to Counter Argument 3

Yes, the entire Transcendental Argument is based on a presupposition. That is the point. All philosophical systems and worldviews are based on presuppositions. Nothing can be known without a foundation of knowledge, therefore a presupposition is made as a foundation upon which all other knowledge is built. Everyone has presuppositions that they believe without any doubt or else they would not know anything at all. TAG maintains that the theistic worldview

⁶⁸ This was another one of Stein's arguments in the Debate.

with a God that is all-powerful, universal, immaterial, and invariant, is the only philosophical system that can render the possibility of knowledge. When an atheist tries to argue against the theistic worldview, he or she comes with the presupposition that knowledge and coherent reason is possible, or else they would not be arguing in the first place.

Counter Argument 4

The theist is avoiding the argument of the existence of God by asking how an atheistic worldview can account for universal laws. The proof does not prove God's existence directly, but instead indirect.

Response to Counter Argument 4

Correct, this is a new way of approaching the question of God's existence. Unlike traditional apologetics that take the question head on, presuppositional apologetics and TAG take a step back and instead ask the question, "Based on the presupposition of worldviews, can the philosophical systems themselves support or account for the existence of the laws of thought, science, mathematics, and morality?" By proving that the atheistic worldview cannot account for these types of transcendent, invariant, and abstract laws, and by the impossibility to the contrary, the existence of God is indirectly proven.

Counter Argument 5

If God is unchanging and his nature is the source of the laws of logic, and if God performs miracles in the natural world and miracles break the laws of nature, then God is breaking the laws of nature, and thus not consistent, or unchangeable.

Response to Counter Argument 5

The laws of logic are unchanging and unbreakable; therefore, God cannot break the laws of logic. He is not breaking the laws of logic because they transcend the universe and are the way

God thinks and acts in the universe. The laws of nature, however, can change, because the laws of nature do not transcend the natural world. If the universe were to cease to exist, the laws of nature would cease to exist. The laws of nature describe how matter behaves in the universe and God can change the nature of the universe to fit with his unchanging quality. For instance, if he decides to alter the functioning of the universe in order to sustain his unchanging will, then that option is certainly available to him, and does not induce any contradiction.

THE ART OF DEBATE

Apologetics is an art and a craft. One must know the subject and theoretical aspects thoroughly before reaching the practical ones. Unfortunately, many people stop at the mastery of knowledge, and rarely convert from textbook to real life. When approaching a debate or defending an argument in general, one must not only clearly understand his/her side of the argument, but the opposing side of the argument as well. Failure to do so will often result in a foolish and irrational discussion and nothing meaningful is conversed.

When entering a formal debate or a delightful discussion with a colleague, one must present a claim (what they are arguing), a warrant (the evidence), and the impact (why it matters). Unfortunately for the theist, he/she is not allowed to use evidence from the Bible, his/her faith, or private revelations when engaging in a debate with an atheist. They will not accept this as evidence. If the atheist does bring up the Bible by referencing a specific text or story, try to avoid using it as proof. However, the theist must have extensive knowledge of the Bible just in case the atheist does try to argue against it. If the theist does not have comprehensive knowledge of the Bible, he must remind the atheist that the atheists does not allow for the Bible to be presented as evidence so he cannot use it to debate against him.

One thing atheists like to do is put the Burden of Proof on the theists. This burden is put on anyone who is making a claim. It is now their responsibility to provide proof for that claim, hence the Burden of Proof. A good debate strategy would be to shift the Burden of Proof onto the atheist, which is something that Dr. Bahnsen did against Dr. Stein. He asked Stein to prove how an atheistic universe, that is materialistic, changing, and disordered, could account for laws that are immaterial, invariant, and universal. Although one should attempt to shift the Burden of Proof onto the atheist, when it comes down to it, both parties have the Burden of Proof, because

both sides are presenting a claim. The theist is asserting that God does exist, while the atheist is asserting that God does not exist. Both have to provide evidence to support their claim.

When listening to the opposition, listen closely. As a debater, one has the responsibility to address anything that the opposition claims. In a formal debate, if one does not address any of these claims made by the opposition, it will automatically be assumed true. This is called the Burden of the Rejoinder. When listening, there are three things to consider: First, how is the opposition approaching the argument? Is their methodology unsound? Second, what tasks have the opposition set for themselves and are they addressing them? Third, what is the general idea of the case and what assumptions are the opposition making? One must ask these three questions and be able to turn the answers into attacks.

Try to avoid the following. First, do not tell an atheist that they do not have morals. They do have morals, so turn it around and make them account for their moral standard. Second, do not use clichés. These will not help the argument and no one wants to hear them. Third, do not ignore any insights that the atheist might have. If neither the atheist nor the theist went into the debate open-minded then nothing would ever be accomplished. This is not a suggestion to convert to atheism, but instead if the atheist gives a strong counter argument to the theist's argument, the theist should not dismiss it as illogical or nonsense. One must contemplate the counter argument to fix any flaws in the argument that they are presenting and give a worthy rebuttal.

Watch out for logical fallacies. One must listen to hear if the opponent is using them, and be careful not to use them for oneself. Some more common logical fallacies are as follows: Red Herring: changing the subject in order to avoid the argument; Circular Reasoning: using an

unproven point to prove a point or assuming the conclusion in the premise⁶⁹; Straw Man: oversimplifying or even misrepresenting the opposition's argument to make it easier to prove; Ad Hominem: attacking the character of the opponent instead of their argument to undermine without actually addressing the topic.

Upon review: understand both sides, present a claim, a warrant, and an impact, shift the Burden of Proof, listen closely to the opposition, and watch out for logical fallacies.

⁶⁹ The Transcendental Argument for God's existence is not circular reasoning because the presupposition of God is the foundation in which Christians build all other knowledge. Everyone has a foundational presupposition.

THE TRANSCENDENTAL STRATEGY

When debating an atheist, follow these steps to help guide in the presentation of the Transcendental Argument for God's existence.

Step One:

Put the theist and the atheist on equal playing field with a point of contingency. "Both are at fault on aspects of inaccuracy, and in violence. Both are not perfect. Both have made mistakes."⁷⁰ This will start the debate off with a clean slate that will focus only on the philosophical systems themselves and not the people who adhere to them.

Step Two:

Define the terms that will be used in the discussion. What is the definition of God? What is atheism? When debating with an atheist on the existence of God, do not follow Bahnsen as he attempted to prove the Triune Christian God. One must prove that it is possible for a god to even exist and then he/she can argue that the God from the Christian worldview is the one true God. If one does not define the terms at the beginning of the debate, the two sides might argue for or against two completely different things and will have made no advancement in the discussion.

Step Three:

Present the nature of evidence for God's existence. Define what will be considered "proof." The kind of evidence and arguments one uses when answering the question of God's existence is determined by the metaphysical nature of God and one's presuppositional worldview. Not all factual questions are answered in the same way with the same type of evidences.

Step Four:

⁷⁰ Bahnsen, Greg. *The Great Debate*. Irvine: University of California, 1985.

Show the atheist that no one is presuppositionally neutral. Neutrality is not going to be allowed because everyone has presuppositions. Everyone has undeniable knowledge that they believe is true on which they base all other knowledge. Suggest to the atheists that the proper evidence has to be acknowledged and if they are going to reasonably resolve the differences in their beliefs, they must look at each other's presuppositions and compare each other's worldview and philosophical system and ask which one allows for reasoning at all.

Step Five:

Begin a discussion with the atheist on what is right and wrong and ask where he gets his standard of goodness in order to judge his morals. Ask the atheist why man can consistently predict the nature of the universe and guide him or her to see that without uniformity in the universe, there would be no science or mathematics. Ask the atheist if he can reason logically. This may seem like an inept question but when he answers the obvious yes, ask what basis he has to think logically and to use the laws of logic to reason. Humanity is able to have science, mathematics, and reasoning because there are immaterial and invariant laws that control the universe. Such laws include the laws of science, the laws of mathematics, and more specifically, the laws of logic. Push the atheist to admit to the existence of these laws (this will not be difficult). If the atheist reasons logically, then there has to be laws of reasoning and thought that exist.

Step Six:

Deny the atheist the pleasure of using the laws of logic until they can account for universal and invariant laws like these in their worldview. God is the source of all knowledge, and without Him, no knowledge would be possible.

Step Seven:

Finally, present the Transcendental Proof for God's existence and be clear that God is proven indirectly through the impossibility of the contrary. An atheistic worldview of random chance and disorder cannot account for laws that are universal, abstract, and invariant. Therefore, the atheist has no basis in reasoning or truth. However, the theistic worldview can account for these laws because there is a God that is also universal, abstract, invariant, and transcendent that defines these laws. Without God, there could be no knowledge. Intelligibility exists in the universe, because God exists.

CONCLUSION

The Great Debate between Dr. Bahnsen and Dr. Stein proved to be an effective case study on the Transcendental Argument for God's existence being put into practice. For many people, it is hard to make the leap from the theoretical and technical discussion of TAG to the actual practice and practical use of it in real life. However, the jump from textbook to real life is most crucial. It can be very difficult to accomplish any meaningful discussion when conversing with someone who has a different worldview, because a different worldview means different presuppositions. Because of differing presuppositions, the same evidence can result in different conclusions. This is why there needs to be an attack at the root of the problem; the presuppositions and worldviews themselves. Apologetics can prove to be very effective in the field of evangelism; therefore, one must not only have mastery over the knowledge of the argument but also mastery over the exhibition of the argument.

TAG proves the existence of God through the impossibility of the contrary. The very debate between atheists and theists gives proof to the existence of the laws of logic. Atheists attempt to use the laws of logic, science, and mathematics to disprove the existence of God when God is the reason that these laws exist. The very laws that they are trying to disprove the existence of God, prove the existence of God. In a debate where TAG is being employed, it ultimately boils down to which worldview allows for laws that are universal, abstract, and invariant. Although atheists use logic, science, and mathematics, they cannot account for them. However, the theistic worldview can account for them because in this philosophical system, there exists a God that is the standard of goodness, reason, and perfection. This God is transcendent of the universe, immaterial, absolute, all-powerful, and invariant. This God defines these laws and they proclaim the way He thinks and acts in His kingdom.

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