

BOOK TWO

RATIONALISM IN CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

## SUMMARY OF BOOK TWO

Rationalistic apologetics seeks to build a rational case for Christianity by showing how it conforms to criteria by which truth claims of competing world views are evaluated. This method addresses eight religious subcategories: experience, psychology, language, epistemology, theistic proofs, the problem of evil, ethics, and miracle. Rationalist apologists seek to show that: (1) religious experience is not an invalid measure of the reality transcending each experience; (2) traditional psychological explanations of religion are speculative; (3) alleged meaninglessness of religious language is based on unverifiable empirical assumptions; (4) Christianity is logically consistent, internally coherent, and comprehensive; (6) the problem of evil will be resolved eschatologically, as epitomized in the Incarnation; (7) Christian ethics are superior in coherence, consistency, and comprehensiveness; (8) miracles can be historically authenticated, and their validity cannot be rejected on the mere ground of being unusual or in conflict with natural law.

Atheism, agnosticism, monism, dualism, deism, naturalism, humanism, existentialism, panentheism, and nihilism are found wanting by rationalists in comparison with Christian theism's foundation for metaphysics, epistemology, and morality. Christianity also forms a more satisfactory basis for personal fulfillment, identity, and competence.

Recent rationalist apologists include C. S. Lewis, E. J. Carnell, and N. L. Geisler. Lewis shows that the alternatives to acknowledging Christ's claims are

inconceivable, e.g., that he was a lunatic or a demon. Carnell acknowledges that faith is a gift of God, but that apologetics prepares the heart for faith. Such faith must be consistent with truth, which must be systematically consistent.

Norman Geisler is a neo-Thomist in his sympathy with theistic proofs. Applying the principles of "affirmability" and "undeniability," it is not necessary for Geisler to show that God's nonexistence is inconceivable, but only that His existence is undeniable. As a rationalist Geisler believes that human depravity has not substantially distorted human reason, and that the unregenerated person is therefore able to respond correctly to general revelation but needs special grace to respond properly to special revelation. Like evidentialists, he distinguishes between "certitude," which is the effect of the Holy Spirit's internal witness, and "certainty," which is always limited but is the more than probable persuasion of external evidence. Faith is the intellectual and volitional response to credible evidence.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE RATIONALISTIC DEFENSE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

#### Religious Experience

While rationalistic apologists do not build their case on religious experience, they generally argue that there is no a priori basis for ruling experience invalid when it claims to impart knowledge of God. The biblical concept of God is not only infinite-transcendent, but also personal-immanent. The Christian faith is based upon revelation from this infinite-personal God, and there can be no awareness of a revelation that is not experienced. Properly understood, religious experience does not threaten the authority of reason or challenge the primacy of revelation.<sup>1</sup>

In his Arguments for the Existence of God, John Hick presents the skeptic's response:

. . . if it is reasonable for one man, on the basis of his distinctively religious experience, to affirm the reality of God it must also be reasonable for another man, in the absence of any such experience, not to affirm the reality of God.<sup>2</sup>

While it is true that a claim to have had an experience of God does not demonstrate the reality of God, it would be inappropriate for the skeptic to rule out the possibility of a direct intuition of God. Christian apologists argue that

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<sup>1</sup>Rheinallt Nantlais Williams, Faith, Facts, History, Science--and How They Fit Together (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1973), p. 95.

"the Bible does not claim that revelation was intended to prove validity in the logical sense, but rather to illumine reality and truth in a concrete situation."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the negative statement that one has not had an experience of God is not logically parallel to the positive affirmation of an experience of God.

Religious experience does not prove the existence of God to those who have not had such experiences, but the subjectivity of such experience does not nullify its evidential value. Williams argues that the subjectivity of religious experience is similar to that of sensory experience:

. . . the taboo on religious experience talk among so many contemporary philosophers isn't basically due to the fact that it is subjective, but to the fact that it contravenes the dogma that the rightful monopoly of the route to facts belongs to a syndicate of the five senses. But this dogma itself is either based on experience or on subjective interpretation; in which case (on the skeptic's own logic) it is useless as proof to anyone who doesn't already believe it.<sup>4</sup>

Christian apologists also affirm the transcultural and transtemporal nature of religious experience and hold that this experience involves a commitment to a transcendent realm. It is often argued that this universality points to a basic human drive toward self-transcendence. Christian rationalists affirm that to be real, this transcendent dimension must be more than a subjective projection or wish-fulfillment; it must have an objective and independent existence. Religious experience alone does not provide a sufficient

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<sup>2</sup>John Hick, Arguments for the Existence of God (New York: Seabury Press, 1971).

<sup>3</sup>Williams, Faith, Facts, p. 98.

verification-base to establish the objective reality of this dimension, but it is an evidence that carries some weight. Apologists maintain that just as other human needs correspond to real things that can fulfill those needs, so the human need for the transcendent is fulfillable. Skeptics may deny this, but in a practical sense, no one can live consistently with the logical implications of a universe devoid of the divine (no ultimate meaning, purpose, value). Along these lines, it is also argued that the evidential value of religious experience could only be ignored by making the radical claim that every person in the history of the world who claimed to have a religious experience has been totally deceived. The case is that there must be a basis in reality for at least some religious experience.<sup>5</sup>

#### Psychology of Religion

From the time of William James, G. A. Coe, E. D. Starbuck, and Edward S. Ames, psychology of religion has been characterized by the widely held hypothesis that religion gradually evolved as a more or less idealized expression of "the most elemental and urgent life impulses."<sup>6</sup> The crucial issue for Ames was "the psychological problem concerning the nature and significance of religious ideas, and whether, if they lose their value as knowledge, they may still

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>5</sup>Norman L. Geisler, Philosophy of Religion (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), pp. 80-82.

<sup>6</sup>Edward Scribner Ames, The Psychology of Religious Experience (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910), p. vii.

retain importance in other aspects of experience, such as may be involved in the conservation of value."<sup>7</sup> For many psychologists of religion, the stress on religious phenomenology inculcated a skepticism with respect to religious ideology. In Freud's analysis, the ideas of God and an afterlife are projections of human desires and fears in an attempt to humanize nature. According to The Future of an Illusion, the forces of nature and destiny were personalized to make them approachable and enable us to "deal by psychical means with our senseless anxiety."<sup>8</sup> The common scenario is that religion evolved from "a simplistic animism to a complex monotheism which culminates in a benevolent Providence who manifests father-like characteristics."<sup>9</sup>

Christian apologists respond by saying that the wish-projection explanation in itself does not disprove the view that belief in God and an afterlife has a rational foundation. An alternative theory must be superior in its internal coherence and in its correspondence to the facts to refute an existing theory. Apologists also answer that

. . . the question of the origin of our beliefs is logically irrelevant to the truth or falsity of those beliefs. . . . The appeal to the alleged origins of our beliefs as a substitute for arguments pro or con about the beliefs themselves is

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 10. Italics mine.

<sup>8</sup>Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 20.

<sup>9</sup>R. C. Sproul, The Psychology of Atheism (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974), p. 44.

called by logicians the genetic fallacy, and is condemned in most elementary logic books.<sup>10</sup>

It would be an exceedingly difficult task to prove that religion originated due to the phenomena of guilt and the fear of nature (Freud), wish-projection and anthropomorphism (Feuerbach), economic exploitation of the proletariat by the ruling classes (Marx), or lust for power and fear of the nihil (Nietzsche). And even if one of these explanations could be demonstrated to fit all the historical facts, this would not answer the question of whether belief in God and an afterlife is true or false. Alternative theories like these, however, do counter the argument that the existence of God is the only explanation of the emergence of the religious consciousness.

Sproul argues that psychological explanations of religious beliefs do not settle the question of whether those beliefs are true or false:

To show demonstrably that men desire a God or have a propensity to wish for the existence of a deity is not to demonstrate anything about whether or not there is, in fact, such a deity that corresponds to their desires. Unless we can establish a universal principle to the effect that anything man desires to be cannot or does not exist, . . . explanations do not touch on the issue of the existence of God.<sup>11</sup>

The phenomenology of religion teaches much about man but nothing about God. Indeed, the case for theism would be quite weak if it depended on religious phenomena for its demonstration, but Christian apologists do not rest their case on this kind of evidence. The psychology of religion provides valuable

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<sup>10</sup>Richard L. Purtill, Reason to Believe (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 32.

perceptions in the area of human behavior, but when psychologists of religion introduce tacit metaphysical assumptions into their work, they step beyond the boundary of their discipline. The phenomena of self-fulfillment and projection are independent of the ontological status of a supreme being.

A number of Christian apologists also turn the tables on those who dismiss religious phenomena with the label of "wishful thinking." This is the thesis of R. C. Sproul's book, The Psychology of Atheism:

The "attractive" features of the Christian God that might incline a person to project His existence as a bromide or narcotic to help him face the threatening character of life are not only equalized and neutralized by the threatening features of God but are overwhelmingly outweighed by the traumatic experience of encountering God. Though man may desire and create for himself a deity who meets his needs and provides him with innumerable benefits, he will not desire a God who is holy, omniscient, and sovereign.<sup>12</sup>

Traditional Christianity does not present a flattering picture of the human condition. "We can be bribed or flattered into accepting responsibility by being given power or admiration; but complete responsibility for our actions to a power infinitely superior to ourselves, without compensating power or admiration, is completely repugnant to us."<sup>13</sup> The concept of moral nakedness before the holiness of the mysterium tremendum is hardly an example of projection or wishful thinking. Apologists add that the case for the psychology

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<sup>11</sup>Sproul, Psychology, p. 50.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>13</sup>Purtill, Reason, p. 33.

of atheism can be built upon the same elements as those involved in the psychology of theism. Those who assert the autonomy of man clearly desire to remove the repugnant idea of moral responsibility to an absolute superior. There is a psychological "vested interest" in both groups in spite of the radical difference in their conclusions.

Rationalism in Christian apologetics repudiates reductionistic trends in the psychology of religion and moves the question of theism from the psychological to the philosophical arena. This does not minimize the valuable contribution of this field, but it does stress that the epistemological boundaries of the psychology of religion should not be overstepped.

#### Religious Language

Moving from phenomenology to epistemology, the next issue in rationalistic apologetics is religious language. A number of philosophers have challenged the validity of religious language, arguing, as did A. J. Ayer in Language, Truth and Logic, that it is meaningless. The problem of verifiability was raised by the adherents of Logical Positivism and in the earlier and later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. More recently, Anthony Flew's parable of the invisible gardener in New Essays in Philosophical Theology<sup>14</sup> has become a rallying point for the question of falsification in religious language. In addition,

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<sup>14</sup>Flew and MacIntyre, New Essays, pp. 96-99. This parable (a modification of an earlier tale by John Wisdom) also appears in John Hick, ed., The Existence of God (New York: Macmillan Company, 1964), pp. 224-27.

philosopher R. B. Braithwaite has argued in his essay, "An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief,"<sup>15</sup> that religious language is ethically but not factually significant, a conclusion shared by a number of linguistic and analytical philosophers.

Taking his cue from the French Protestant theologian Auguste Sabatier, Thomas Silkstone has offered a mediating position by emphasizing the poetical and symbolic character of religious language.<sup>16</sup> John Hick's use of "eschatological verification" as a means of demonstrating that religious language can have factual significance has also added new perspectives to this issue.<sup>17</sup> Hick has shown that verification and falsification are not always symmetrically related.

Many Christian apologists have addressed the questions of meaning, verifiability, and falsifiability in religious language. This involves, among other things, a refutation of Logical Positivism, for even though this philosophical theory has been largely discredited, variations of it continue to be used. Christian apologists agree that a statement is suspect if it is immune to any form of verification or falsification. But they criticize the positivists' attempt to reduce the criteria of verification to the realm of mathematics or of the empirical

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<sup>15</sup>Hick, Existence, pp. 228-52.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Silkstone, Religion, Symbolism and Meaning (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1968).

methodology of science. The scientific method is useful for gaining knowledge on one level, but there are other spheres of knowledge, including historical, personal, philosophical, moral, and religious knowledge that are outside the realm of scientific inquiry and require their own criteria of verifiability. In addition, even scientific hypotheses often deal with things that are only indirectly, not directly verifiable (e.g., neutrinos).

Apologists hold that the crowning blow to Logical Positivism is that it is self-defeating. This is because its own claim that statements must be empirically verifiable is itself empirically unverifiable. It is a principle of thinking, not an empirical observation. The realms of metaphysics, morals, and religion cannot be so easily dismissed by an unverifiable reductionistic principle.

The linguistic conclusions reached by Wittgenstein are also criticized by Christian apologists who challenge his stringent principle of meaning and "ordinary" use as an arbitrary and inadequate paradigm that is inconsistent with the nature of concept formation and interior experience.

The "Oxford" or "Ordinary Language" philosophers have modified the principles of Logical Positivism and assert that God-language is meaningless because it is subject to so many qualifications. The love and goodness of God, for example, are defined in such a way as to become compatible with the evident suffering and evil on this planet. Apologists answer these charges in several

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<sup>17</sup>Hick, Existence, pp. 252-74, and Basil Mitchell, The Justification of

ways. They challenge the assumptions made by these language philosophers with respect to the problem of evil and hold that a person's perception of the things he observes are largely colored by presuppositions and predispositions. Flew's parable of the gardener is a case in point, because it would require the one who created the world to be like it in a spatial and temporal sense in order to have any meaning. But theists argue that nature points beyond itself, not within itself, to the cause of its existence. Thus, it would be inappropriate to demand empirical evidence for the existence of God. This does not mean that the concept of God is meaningless, because contra Logical Positivism, there are other valid approaches to evidence.

Apologists also argue that "any definition of meaning that rules out consideration of ultimate meaning must be partial and arbitrary."<sup>18</sup> Flew makes his gardener "eternally elusive," but this is completely inconsistent with the theistic position which holds that the present space-time continuum is ephemeral. The Scriptures consistently speak of what Hick calls an "eschatological verification" when the spiritual verities that are evident to those whose presuppositional grids do not rule them out will become manifest to all. Some analytic philosophers have recently challenged the concept of disembodied survival and continuity, but there is no logical reason why the personality or soul

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Religious Belief (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), pp. 11-15, 110.

<sup>18</sup>Williams, Faith, Facts, pp. 36-37.

of an individual cannot bridge the gap between the body prior to death, and the resurrected body as portrayed in Christian theology.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Purtill, Reason, p. 30.

### Religious Epistemology

The rationalistic approach to Christian apologetics stresses the need to evaluate and compare conflicting world views by means of certain epistemological criteria. In this approach, there is no substantive conflict between faith and reason, because it perceives the Christian world view as a reasonable faith, a step into the light rather than a leap into the darkness of irrationality and subjectivity. Even the naturalistic world view involves an interplay of faith and reason, because faith involves a broad context of beliefs and assumptions. In this sense, faith is not the unique province of the religious person, but it is characteristic of all metaphysical positions. In Epistemology: The Justification of Belief, David L. Wolfe discusses the relationship of reason and religious belief:

The believer is a critical adventurer, taking rationally responsible risks. If he or she takes a leap of faith, it should be a leap conditioned by criticism in its choice of alternatives and responsible for continued criticism after the leap. This is the case whether the interpretive scheme to which a person is committed is "religious" or not.<sup>20</sup>

Since world views are paradigmatic belief systems, the real issue is not whether faith is involved, but whether it can withstand critical testing.<sup>21</sup>

The criteria of verification employed by many Christian apologists are logical consistency, internal coherence, and comprehensiveness (applicability of

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<sup>20</sup>David L. Wolfe, Epistemology: The Justification of Belief (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1982), p. 71.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

the interpretive scheme to all experience).<sup>22</sup> These criteria are then applied to Christianity's truth claims to verify the cogency of biblical theism. Rationalistic apologists try to demonstrate the reasonableness of the Christian world view, but this does not mean that they are pure rationalists in their epistemology. Most would be quick to acknowledge that rationalism per se is an inadequate approach to religious knowledge because it elevates human reason to the level of an ultimate arbiter of truth and cannot arrive at substantive knowledge about God. Rationalistic apologists also criticize empiricism, subjectivism, pragmatism, and presuppositionalism in a variety of ways to show that they too fall short as epistemological methods. Stuart C. Hackett, for instance, in The Resurrection of Theism opts for "rational empiricism" in which knowledge is only possible "in terms of a synthetic a priori structure that the mind initially brings to the data of experience."<sup>23</sup> This kind of combinationalism that synthesizes elements from rationalism and empiricism is characteristic of what this study calls "rationalistic apologetics."

Advocates of this approach hold that apart from general revelation (revelation mediated through the universe and through the nature of man) and special or redemptive revelation (written revelation and personal revelation in Jesus Christ), knowledge about God would be systematically elusive. Arthur F.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

Holmes distinguishes six kinds of human knowledge (scientific, metaphysical, historical, moral, personal, and religious) and develops a different model for each.<sup>24</sup> Religious knowledge, he argues, incorporates elements from the other five:

Religious knowledge thus arises in the context of redemptive experience: it embraces historical and metaphysical and moral as well as personal ingredients; it includes cognitive elements that are objectively true as well as the subjective and emotive aspects of personal involvement.<sup>25</sup>

Most rationalistic apologists try to steer a course between the Scylla of religious knowledge reduced to theoretical content without personal involvement and the Charybdis of religious knowledge reduced to personal involvement without cognitive content.<sup>26</sup> Biblical revelation is susceptible to verification not only on the scientific, historical, and philosophical levels, but also on the moral and personal levels. These apologists argue that there is "no contradiction between analytic philosophy and traditional Christianity, between logic and the love of God."<sup>27</sup> While they recognize that logic alone does not lead all the way to Christian belief and commitment, they hold that it does move the open inquirer

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<sup>23</sup>Stuart C. Hackett, The Resurrection of Theism, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982 [1957]), p.66.

<sup>24</sup>Arthur F. Holmes, Faith Seeks Understanding (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971).

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Purtill, Reason, p. 13.

in that direction.<sup>28</sup> Revelation is not only propositional but personal, and there is a degree of epistemological ambiguity in religious knowledge which requires a personal choice to respond to the available evidence. In a chapter entitled "The Credentials of Revelation" Purtil writes:

Given that the perfect Good, once experienced, is totally overwhelming, we can see that the only possibility of a really free choice of God is a situation where the full glory is veiled, and we must endure, suffer, and overcome to choose the Good. Thus the basic reason for suffering can be seen in a new perspective when we realize that we can enjoy the Glory as ones who have freely chosen God only if life exhibits the pain and difficulty, the ambiguity and tests of faith that it in fact exhibits.<sup>29</sup>

Even when the revelatory character of the Bible is acknowledged, there are a number of remaining theological mysteries like divine sovereignty versus human responsibility, immanence versus transcendence, omnipresence versus localization, and foreknowledge versus freedom. This is because the Bible purports to mediate knowledge of an infinite-personal creator to a finite-personal creation. Christian epistemology affirms that God can be known truly through revelation but not exhaustively. The mysteries of Scripture transcend the limits of human comprehension, but they are not intrinsically contradictory.

### Theistic Proofs

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

The first two philosophy of religion categories are phenomenology and epistemology. The third, ontology, is represented by theistic proofs, the problem of evil, ethics, and miracles.

There is an ambiguity to the term "theistic proofs" because "there is no simple concept of proof by which all things are proved."<sup>30</sup> The procedures used to establish the validity of scientific theories are not the same as those used in historical, mathematical, moral, or personal inquiries. There is considerable disagreement even among rationalistic Christian apologists over the value and relevance of the a posteriori and a priori proofs for the existence of God. Immanuel Kant's critique of the traditional theistic proofs continues to be influential, and most philosophers and theologians have moved away from the scholastic mentality of solid and unequivocal arguments for God's existence. Those who engage in natural theology are in general more cautious about the compelling effects of theistic proofs. These apologists believe that natural theology has evidential value in showing the reasonableness of belief in God even though it does not provide irrefutable confirmation.<sup>31</sup> Faith is not constructed out of reason alone but must be seen in the broader context of revelation, history, philosophy, and religious experience. Rationalistic apologists acknowledge that there are limits to reason; but while reason cannot produce

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<sup>30</sup>Bernard L. Ramm, A Christian Appeal to Reason (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1972), p. 79.

faith, they firmly believe that it supports theistic belief. Thus, Galloway in The Philosophy of Religion concludes:

A strict proof of the existence of God we found impossible. But in trying to make our experience coherent we were led to conclude that a twofold postulate was necessary: an ultimate Ground of the world and an ultimate Value.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, some apologists are convinced that when the theistic proofs are properly presented, they withstand the standard criticisms and maintain their validity. In The Resurrection of Theism, Hackett answers the objections to the cosmological and teleological arguments and remarks that the traditional arguments for God

[lead] to the firm conclusion that theism alone actually poses a solution to the metaphysical problem. The whole range of critical objections against such a view was found to vanish in the mist before the searching eyes of rational analysis until at the end of the way we found at last that man is not alone, but finds his highest destiny in the knowledge of God.<sup>33</sup>

As Bernard Ramm notes, "most discussions about a posteriori proofs for God's existence revolve around the expression given them by Thomas."<sup>34</sup> But the Thomistic arguments from motion, causation, possibility and necessity, gradation of being, and governance of the world in the Summa Theologica are only brief outlines, not complete arguments (they cover only a page or two in

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<sup>31</sup>Williams, Faith, Facts, p. 52; Ramm, Reason, p. 95.

<sup>32</sup>Galloway, Philosophy, p. 589.

<sup>33</sup>Hackett, Theism, p. 365.

<sup>34</sup>Ramm, Reason, p. 81.

print). Refutation of theistic arguments on this level is like knocking down a straw man. Many apologists claim that the modern forms of the theistic proofs are more formidable opponents that are not so easily refuted.

The best form of the cosmological argument is the argument from contingent to necessary being. Proponents argue that if anything now exists, something must be eternal, or else something not eternal must have emerged from nothing. The principal options are that the universe is eternal or that it is the product of an eternal and necessary being. Three scientific arguments used to show that the universe had a beginning are the implications of the "big bang" (even if there were a series of big bangs, the universe would not oscillate from eternity),<sup>35</sup> the implications of the second law of thermodynamics, and the irreversible conversion of hydrogen into helium through stellar fusion while the universe continues to be composed primarily of hydrogen. There are also the philosophical arguments that "a beginningless series of events in time cannot exist" and that "the series of events in time cannot be actually infinite."<sup>36</sup> If the universe is contingent, its ultimate cause cannot be contingent because of the problem of infinite regress. This requires an uncaused or necessary being.

Opponents have raised a variety of objections to these arguments, including the fallacy of composition, the problem of moving from finite effects to

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<sup>35</sup>William Lane Craig, The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe (San Bernardino, California: Here's Life Publishers, 1979).

an infinite cause, and the nature of causality, and these in turn have been answered by proponents of the cosmological argument. The debate between opponents and advocates of this argument continues, but some writers prefer to steer a middle course by recognizing that it has at least some validity. While John Hick, for example, does not believe that it constitutes a demonstration of God's existence, he concludes that

It leaves us with the alternatives that the universe is an inexplicable brute fact, or that its existence with the structure that it has is intelligible in the only way in which it could ever finally be intelligible to us, namely through its dependence upon a reality that is ultimate in the order of mind.<sup>37</sup>

The teleological argument is an old and popular proof for God because of the myriad examples of orderliness and intelligibility in the universe. As with the cosmological argument, not all apologists who employ the argument from design hold that it constitutes an irrefutable demonstration of God's existence. In The Case for Christian Theism, Hoover recognizes the limits of this argument:

The Design Argument is only an inference; it derives its strength from the Method of Coherence. No theistic teleologist ever intended to affirm that he had found God directly and confirmed his existence. The teleologist assembles a mass of orderly phenomena or orderly events and then argues that the theory of a designer is coherent with the phenomena and events.<sup>38</sup>

The primary apologetic thrust of this argument is to show that the complexity and order of the universe is better explained as the result of an intelligent

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-51.

<sup>37</sup>Hick, Existence, pp. 51-52.

designer (theism) than as a result of a chance process (naturalism). The entire scientific enterprise is built upon the teleological assumption of a meaningful correlation between the rational constitution of the mind and the external reality of the intelligible world.

The theory of evolution has of course been used as a significant objection to this argument at least insofar as organic design is concerned. Some apologists have invoked the probabilistic arguments against chance biogenesis presented in Human Destiny by Pierre Lecompte du Noüy<sup>39</sup> and Time's Arrow and Evolution by Harold F. Blum.<sup>40</sup> This has provoked considerable controversy, especially since new scientific support for this argument has been coming in from unexpected quarters (e.g., Evolution from Space by Sir Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe).<sup>41</sup>

The moral argument relates to the universality of moral experience and holds that individual and social subjectivism provide no ultimate basis for moral law. The only rational locus for morality that escapes the problem of relativism is an absolute moral being. Apologists answer the objection that ethical

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<sup>38</sup>Arlie J. Hoover, The Case for Christian Theism (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 72.

<sup>39</sup>Pierre Lecompte du Noüy, Human Destiny (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1947).

<sup>40</sup>Harold F. Blum, Time's Arrow and Evolution, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

judgments vary from place to place by arguing that regardless of time or culture there is a built-in concept of normative conduct, a universal sense of "ought" and "should." It is true that people can acknowledge the moral law without seeing this as a theistic proof, but this does not mean that there could be real validity to such a law apart from God.<sup>42</sup> The real thrust of this argument lies in the fact that people behave in their criticisms and approbations as if theism were true, that is, as if there are such things as absolute rights and absolute wrongs.<sup>43</sup> Apologists argue that one would have to assume this position in order to criticize it as wrong.

The anthropological argument includes not only the moral argument but also the arguments from aesthetics, the nature of human thought, and the need for meaning, purpose, and hope. Few apologists would claim that these arguments constitute definitive proofs for the existence of God, but they do hold that these arguments point in the direction of theism and away from naturalism.

The argument from aesthetics appeals to a personal God as the only adequate explanation of the universal aesthetic experience in man. While there are differences in taste, there is, nevertheless, a profound degree of consensus

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<sup>41</sup>Sir Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe, Evolution from Space (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981).

<sup>42</sup>Williams, Faith, Facts, p. 104.

<sup>43</sup>G. K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy, Image Books (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1959 [1903]), pp. 106-110; C. S. Lewis, The Abolition of

concerning beauty and greatness in art, literature, music, architecture, and so forth. This awareness and appreciation of what is beautiful cannot be reduced to a mechanical response to sensory input. Apologists maintain that the aesthetic capacity transcends the material world, and naturalism cannot account for this transcendent quality.

The argument from the nature of human thought claims that the mind cannot be the product of a noncognitive process. Many hold that it is self-defeating to argue that the mind is merely the physical brain, an organic electrochemical mechanism which developed through irrational causes. This would be tantamount to using human reasoning to question the validity of human reasoning.

In short, the principal apologetic import of the anthropological argument is that the ultimate validity of fundamental human attributes and experiences like morality, aesthetics, reason, meaning, purpose, and hope must be denied in a universe without God.

We can reject all these lines of argument, but at a cost. . . . if God is not the Source of reason, then we cannot be sure reason has any relevance to the universe. If God is not the Source of morality, then there is no objective moral law which can make demands on all men, and we are left with our subjective likes and dislikes, or with moral ideas programmed into us by a mindless nature and therefore without foundation. Similarly, . . . we can reject the idea of a God who holds out a promise of perfect happiness. But

if we do so we reduce the longing for perfect happiness to an accident or a deception.<sup>44</sup>

The ontological argument is the only purely aprioristic theistic proof.

The first form of this argument as developed and defended against the criticisms of Gaunilo by Anselm was largely ignored until it was revived in the seventeenth century by Descartes. The Cartesian formulation was later refuted by Kant, but it continues to resurface, along with Anselm's second form which adds the concept of necessary existence, in contemporary philosophy of religion. John Hick's The Many-Faced Argument<sup>45</sup> and Alvin Plantinga's The Ontological Argument<sup>46</sup> are entirely devoted to this argument, and it has been recently reformulated by Charles Hartshorne<sup>47</sup> and Norman Malcolm.<sup>48</sup> Most rebuttals revolve around "the fallacy of professing to deduce existence from a concept."<sup>49</sup> In general, rationalistic apologists concur with Norman Geisler's conclusion that "No valid

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<sup>44</sup>Purtill, Reason, p. 104.

<sup>45</sup>John H. Hick and Arthur C. McGill, eds., The Many-Faced Argument (New York: Macmillan Company, 1967).

<sup>46</sup>Alvin Plantinga, ed., The Ontological Argument (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965).

<sup>47</sup>Charles Hartshorne, The Logic of Perfection (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1962).

<sup>48</sup>Norman Malcolm, Knowledge and Certainty (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

<sup>49</sup>Hick, Existence, p. 104.

ontological proof has been given that makes it rationally inescapable to conclude that there is a necessary Being."<sup>50</sup>

### The Problem of Evil

The problems of natural and moral evil have been used by many thinkers like David Hume, H. G. Wells, and Bertrand Russell to challenge the existence of an omnipotent and benevolent God. Theists believe that the problem is soluble, "since the events we condemn and the moral law by which we condemn them are both traceable to the same Source."<sup>51</sup> Carnell summarized the basic elements of the problem in this way:

Either God wants to prevent evil, and He cannot do it; or He can do it and does not want to; or He neither wishes to nor can do it; or He wishes to and can do it. If He has the desire without the power, He is impotent; if He can, but has not the desire, He has a malice which we cannot attribute to Him; if He has neither the power nor the desire, He is both impotent and evil, and consequently not God; if He has the desire and the power, whence then comes evil, or why does He not prevent it?<sup>52</sup>

This problem has elicited a number of different theodicies, but most rationalistic apologists hold that the three propositions that God is omnipotent and good and that evil exists are not incompatible. These apologists criticize proposed theodicies that solve the problem by denying one of these propositions. They

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<sup>50</sup>Norman L. Geisler, Philosophy of Religion (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 161.

<sup>51</sup>Purtill, Reason, p. 52.

<sup>52</sup>Edward J. Carnell, An Introduction to Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), p. 277.

reject the view that God's goodness is different from what humanity calls good, because it renders the goodness of God nugatory and meaningless. In a similar way, they criticize the views that God is somehow "beyond" good and evil, or that all evils are punishments for sin, as inadequate and distorted solutions. Apologists also reject any solution that minimizes the nature of evil or denies its existence (e.g., pantheism and Christian Science).

Finitism, the theodicy that God is unable to control or stop evil (advocates include John Stuart Mill, William James, and Edgar S. Brightman) is denied by most Christian apologists because a finite God cannot assure the final triumph of good, and being finite, would need a Creator to explain its existence. Metaphysical dualism is also rejected by those who defend the Christian perspective, but they do acknowledge a limited or instrumental dualism. But regardless of any beneficial instrumentality that the incorporation of evil in the outworking of the divine purpose may be thought to have, there is still the problem of causation. Most theists respond with the free will defense that the same conditions that are necessary for a volitional response to love also create the possibility of a rejection of that love. "Even God could not create free men without at the same time creating men who were free to rebel."<sup>53</sup>

The free will defense raises certain objections that apologists must deal with, including the problem of human responsibility and divine sovereignty and

the issue of determinism, the question of the mechanistic nature of the human environment, and whether God could have created men free and yet in such a way that they would always choose the good.<sup>54</sup> There is also the question of the relation of natural evil to this defense, since it appears to deal exclusively with moral evil. Some apologists respond with Hugh Silvester that "human suffering from natural disaster is an indirect result of man being out of touch with God."<sup>55</sup> While there is no uniform perspective on the relationship of the disease-death environment to the introduction of moral evil, the present environment of disease and natural disasters is seen from a theistic perspective as a temporary condition.

The problem of the causation of evil often leads to a consideration of alternative scenarios: why a world with evil rather than an amoral world or no world at all; or why not a world with beings that could only respond to good? Apologists discuss the viability of such options and recognize in addition that they must also deal with the problem of cessation as well as causation of evil. They relate this to the work of Jesus Christ and note that he shared man's attitude toward the problem of pain and brought God into his suffering creation to

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<sup>53</sup>Hugh Silvester, Arguing With God (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1971), p. 61.

<sup>54</sup>Flew, New Essays, pp. 144-69.

<sup>55</sup>Silvester, Arguing, p. 77.

provide a final solution.<sup>56</sup> This Christological alleviation of evil provides a demonstration of the goodness of God because he has taken the sorrows and pains that result from evil into himself. Bernard L. Ramm concludes that "the love and goodness of the cross is a greater assurance of God's love than any conceivable tragedy can be a denial of that love and goodness."<sup>57</sup> But evil and suffering remain present realities, and apologists generally agree with Kant's conclusion that the final resolution of this problem must be eschatological. This is an affirmation of the biblical promise that evil will disappear in the consummation of history. "Evil belongs to history; it is not in the eternal constitution of things."<sup>58</sup> Suspension of final judgment is necessary because of the historically bound and finite character of the human perspective.<sup>59</sup>

### Ethics

Rationalistic Christian apologists contend that the Christian world view offers the clearest and most consistent ethical system. They argue that the theistic perspective incorporates the best values of other systems while providing a justification for these values which does not succumb to the cognitive and

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<sup>56</sup>Hoover, Christian Theism, pp. 254-56.

<sup>57</sup>Ramm, Reason, p. 132.

<sup>58</sup>Hoover, Christian Theism, p. 256.

<sup>59</sup>Brian Hebblethwaite, Evil, Suffering and Religion (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1976); John W. Wenham, The Goodness of God (Downers

practical pitfalls characteristic of alternative ethical approaches. Apologists examine the difficulties in ethical relativism, solipsism, hedonism, antinomianism, and utilitarianism, and hold that the only adequate foundation for the good and the right is "the unchanging nature of a God of perfect love and justice."<sup>60</sup> Alternative methods of justifying what is meant by right (e.g., intuition, pragmatism, human authority) are also evaluated by theistic proponents. While they do not all agree on the relative value of rule or duty-centered deontological ethics and result or end-centered teleological ethics, most hold that a comprehensive ethical system will incorporate aspects of both of these approaches.

Apologists maintain that ethical principles must transcend the strictures of culture and period; systems that are partially and totally relativistic are regarded as inconsistent and inadequate. They also criticize the situationism of Joseph Fletcher<sup>61</sup> that is limited to a single universal norm. However, they do not all share the same perspective on the question of the conflict of universal norms. Some hold that there are no real conflicts between these norms, while

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Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1974); Philip Yancey, Where Is God When It Hurts? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977).

<sup>60</sup>Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, Introduction to Philosophy (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 361. Also Bernard L. Ramm, The Right, the Good and the Happy (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1971); Peter Baely, Ethics and Belief (New York: Seabury Press, 1977); Erwin W. Lutzer, The Morality Gap (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

ideal absolutists believe that circumstances inevitably arise when the lesser of two evils must be chosen. Hierarchicalists, a third group, contend that universal norms are hierarchically ordered, and that "God exempts man from obedience to lower commands in view of their overriding duty to the higher one."<sup>62</sup> In this case, the moral obligation is to choose the course that leads to the greatest good in conflict situations rather than to choose the lesser evil.

Philosophical, psychological, and sociological objections have been raised against Christian ethics, and apologists are concerned with answering these objections in their attempt to demonstrate the superior consistency, coherence, and comprehensiveness of the ethical system that is derived from Christian theism. The application of Christian ethics to specific individual and social problems, as in Bernard Ramm's The Right, the Good and the Happy and Norman L. Geisler's Ethics: Alternatives and Issues,<sup>63</sup> is sometimes used to explicate the comprehensiveness of (and variations within) this biblically based system.

### Miracles

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<sup>61</sup>Joseph Fletcher, Situation Ethics: The New Morality (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

<sup>62</sup>Geisler and Feinberg, Philosophy, p. 427.

<sup>63</sup>Norman L. Geisler, Ethics: Alternatives and Issues (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971).

The miracles of the Bible are not incidental but integral to Christian theism, and apologists who seek to establish a case for the rational character of the Christian faith deal directly with the philosophical, scientific, and historical objections that have been raised against miracles. Apologists acknowledge that some of the biblical miracles can be classed under the contingency or coincidence concept of miracle whereby in the words of Colin Brown,

. . . there is no apparent violation of the laws of nature but a conjunction of circumstances which is so unexpected and improbable according to the expected course of events, and so beneficial to at least one of the parties involved, that some would see in it a supernatural ordering of circumstances.<sup>64</sup>

But they contend that events like Christ's turning the water into wine and the resurrection are examples of another category that supersedes the laws of nature. Hoover defines this kind of miracle as "an event, occurring in history, which is so different from a well-known natural law that it arrests the attention of the spectator(s) and deserves to be considered a special intervention of a supernatural agent."<sup>65</sup>

An immediate philosophical objection to this second class of miracle is that it is self-contradictory and meaningless because it is bound up in a conceptual impossibility. Apologists respond that this is relative, not absolute, and use the analogy of how modern technology would have been conceptually

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<sup>64</sup>Colin Brown, ed., History, Criticism and Faith (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 157.

<sup>65</sup>Hoover, Christian Theism, p. 138.

impossible to those in the past. It would be begging the question to define miracles as impossible events and then conclude from the definition that miracles do not occur. Most discussions on the possibility of the miraculous include David Hume's objection to miracles in his Essay on Human Understanding. After defining miracles as violations of natural law which is established by the uniform experience of man, he concluded, in effect, that any reports of miracles must be false for this reason. Christian apologists counter that this is a petitio principii because it assumes the very thing to be proved.

Another philosophical objection is that miracles would only have evidential value for those who are already predisposed in favor of them. In his Critique of Religion and Philosophy, Walter Kaufmann wrote that without faith a miracle will not be perceived as such; "Appeal to miracles as evidence to prove beliefs is therefore circular."<sup>66</sup> Apologists agree that miracles do not necessarily produce faith, but maintain that predisposing faith is not a necessary condition for acknowledging the miraculous nature of an event. Brown adds that "It was encounter with the risen Christ that awakened faith; not faith that created resurrection belief."<sup>67</sup>

A principle scientific objection to miracles is that they "transgress," "violate," or "contradict" the laws of nature. Apologists counter that this is based

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<sup>66</sup>Walter Kaufmann, Critique of Religion and Philosophy (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 92.

on a "misleading analogy between nature's laws and the laws of society."<sup>68</sup> These laws are descriptive, not prescriptive, and it would require a metaphysical assumption that the universe is a system that is closed to any influences apart from the four-dimensional space-time continuum to maintain that the laws of nature could not be superseded by a higher principle on certain occasions. The idea of a deterministic or mechanistic universe is not scientific but metaphysical as is theism. The underlying issue with respect to miracles is whether God exists; if so, miracles are possible.

An additional scientific objection is that miracles would destroy the scientific method by replacing order with irregularity and unpredictability. Apologists respond in part by saying that miracles by their nature must be unique events that stand out against the background of ordinary and regular occurrences. In addition, the biblical record is not replete with miracles; there are only three brief periods when they are reported to have occurred, and these are associated with three revelatory clusters as authenticating signs.

Michael Polanyi wrote in Personal Knowledge that "to the extent to which any event can be established in the terms of natural science, it belongs to the natural order of things."<sup>69</sup> Theists argue that historical, not scientific, inquiry

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<sup>67</sup>Brown, History, Criticism, p. 165.

<sup>68</sup>Hoover, Christian Theism, p. 139.

<sup>69</sup>Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, A Phoenix Book, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 284.

must be applied to the biblical accounts of miracles, and they answer historical objections that question the gullibility of the reporters and the accuracy of their accounts. The principal idea is that the same canons of historical criticism that are applied to other historical records should be applied as well to the biblical accounts without prejudging the case with metaphysical assumptions.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE RATIONALIST CRITIQUE OF COMPETING WORLD VIEWS

The first major component of rationalistic apologetics was the philosophical defense of the Christian religion. This requires a vindication of the historical Christian perspective vis-à-vis the phenomenological, epistemological, and ontological elements of the philosophy of religion as surveyed in the preceding pages. The refutation of alternative world views is the second major component of rationalistic apologetics, involving a more offensive thrust than the first which was more defensive.

Rationalistic apologists generally maintain that while there may be many internal variations, the actual number of basic world views is quite limited. James W. Sire catalogues and contrasts seven in The Universe Next Door and comments:

The fact is that, while world views at first appear to proliferate, they are made up of answers to questions which have only a limited number of answers. For example, to the question of prime reality, only two basic answers can be given: Either it is the universe which is self-existent and has always existed or it is a transcendent God who is self-existent and has always existed. Theism and deism claim the latter; naturalism, Eastern pantheistic monism and the new consciousness claim the former.<sup>70</sup> Earlier in this study, a world view was defined as a person's basic assumptions, held consciously or subconsciously, about life and the nature of reality. These presuppositions are sometimes "only brought to mind when challenged by a

foreigner from another ideological universe."<sup>71</sup> There are different ways of categorizing world views because of areas of overlap. Geisler distinguishes five ways of looking at God (deism, pantheism, panentheism, atheism, and theism) apart from agnosticism.<sup>72</sup> Sire lists seven basic world views: Christian theism, deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, Eastern pantheistic monism, and what he calls "the new consciousness."<sup>73</sup> This chapter will distinguish eleven world views although some of these could be considered together: atheism, agnosticism, monism, dualism, deism, naturalism, humanism, existentialism, panentheism, nihilism, and theism.

#### Criteria of Verification

Apologists compare and contrast world views by considering their conclusions with respect to primary issues like the nature of ultimate reality, the nature of man, the destiny of man, the basis of morality, and the meaning of history. The truth claims of these religious and philosophical perspectives are in many respects mutually exclusive. Apologists contend that choices must and will be made, whether unconsciously or consciously, because no one can remain

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<sup>70</sup>James W. Sire, The Universe Next Door (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 207.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>72</sup>Norman L. Geisler, Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976).

<sup>73</sup>Sire, The Universe.

entirely neutral without embracing a personal Weltanschauung. The responsibility of critical appraisal cannot be avoided by the virtue of tolerance if the choice is to be made on a conscious level. This is the perspective of Gordon R. Lewis in Testing Christianity's Truth Claims:

No amount of tolerance permits belief in contradictory statements. The tolerant person, while firmly committed to one point of view as true, respects the right of others to hold contradictory views without threat of violence. The great value of tolerance in no way exempts us from seeking to resolve the issue of conflicting truth-claims.<sup>74</sup>

The use of criteria of verification by rationalistic apologists to validate Christian theism was mentioned in the discussion of religious epistemology earlier in this chapter. Apologists use the same criteria to evaluate conflicting metaphysical world views, and this includes the logical criterion of consistency. However, as Holmes notes in Faith Seeks Understanding,

Formal logic has limited power; it can neither establish the truth of the premises a deduction uses, nor wholly avoid the subjectivity of the philosopher, nor prove the logical necessity of free actions and unique events. Its primary value is as a negative criterion in exposing inconsistencies and fallacies, and positively in helping us see things as an ordered whole.<sup>75</sup>

In a similar way, Vern S. Poythress stresses the limited value of the use of the law of contradiction by certain apologists in his Philosophy, Science and the

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<sup>74</sup>Gordon R. Lewis, Testing Christianity's Truth Claims (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 16-17.

<sup>75</sup>Holmes, Faith, pp. 51-52.

Sovereignty of God.<sup>76</sup> But the logical quality of coherence involves more than the negative test of non-contradiction. Consistency is a needed prerequisite to the validation of any world view, but coherence requires an intelligible and ordered unity as well as self-consistency.<sup>77</sup>

In addition to these logical or rational criteria, there are also empirical criteria that are used by apologists to assess the value of competing world views. These include comprehensiveness (adequate scope and empirical fitting of the facts) as well as explanatory power (e.g., human intellect, aesthetics, morality).<sup>78</sup> Some apologists also employ a third category of criteria which could be called "personal disclosure value"<sup>79</sup> or "subjective satisfaction."<sup>80</sup> While this is not in itself a sufficient test for objective truth, it is nevertheless needed "if we acknowledge the place of subjectivity and individual freedom in both metaphysical thinking and religious belief."<sup>81</sup> Subjective satisfaction plays a subsidiary role as a cognitive parameter, but it is not irrelevant in view of the fundamental human drive toward meaning, value, and purpose.

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<sup>76</sup>Vern S. Poythress, Philosophy, Science and the Sovereignty of God (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 199-205.

<sup>77</sup>Holmes, Faith, p. 57.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-56; Sire, The Universe, pp. 209-11.

<sup>79</sup>Holmes, Faith, pp. 53-55.

<sup>80</sup>Sire, The Universe, pp. 211-12.

### Atheism

Apologists employ several lines of argument to refute atheism. On the defensive side, they answer the atheistic criticisms of theism including the problem of evil and unjustified suffering, the accusation of antihumanitarianism (e.g., Albert Camus' argument in The Plague), the problem of an infinite regress of causes, the problem of self-causality, and arguments that stem from the nature of the world and man (e.g., freedom versus determinism). R. C. Sproul in The Psychology of Atheism deals at length with the antitheistic objections of Freud, Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche that religion was generated from a wish-fulfilling assignment of human qualities to nature, a projection of the human imagination, or a manipulative effort to control the lower classes. Sproul turns this argument around to show that the atheist has an even greater psychological investment in the nonexistence of God than does the theist in the existence of God.<sup>82</sup> The reality of what Rudolf Otto called the mysterium tremendum in Das Heilige<sup>83</sup> would be disturbing, even terrifying to many. Such a reality would threaten human autonomy, and an encounter with the numinous before which one is completely exposed would be traumatic.

In addition to rebutting antitheistic arguments, Christian apologists seek to directly demonstrate the untenability of atheism. They maintain that the

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<sup>81</sup>Holmes, Faith, p. 55.

<sup>82</sup>Sproul, The Psychology, pp. 56-106.

apodictic affirmation of a knowledge of God's nonexistence would require the attributes of omniscience and omnipresence that are in fact associated with God.<sup>84</sup> One would have to assume God in order to disprove God. Apologists also contend that the atheistic arguments are reversible into theistic arguments and that unlike theism, atheism provides no answer to the fundamental metaphysical questions.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. John W. Harvey, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950 [1917]).

<sup>84</sup>Hoover, Christian Theism, pp. 14-15.

<sup>85</sup>Geisler, Christian Apologetics, pp. 233-34.

### Agnosticism

The principal Christian apologetic thrust against agnosticism concerns the form which holds that God is unknowable. The position that God is not known is not intrinsically inimical to theism, but this is not the case with the position that God cannot be known. The latter relates to the issues previously discussed under religious language and religious epistemology. Logical positivists and linguistic philosophers maintain that God-talk is metaphysically meaningless because it is without empirical grounding. Apologists reply that these arguments are self-defeating since they are based upon nonempirical premises. In a similar way, apologists assess the arguments of Kant and Hume that lead to cognitive skepticism as inherently contradictory because of the unavoidable nature of metaphysical affirmations.

Apologists criticize the hard form of agnosticism that dogmatically maintains the unknowability of God as a position that is unjustifiable apart from omniscience. But they acknowledge that a disproof of total agnosticism does not constitute a proof that God exists. On this level of argument, they simply maintain that God can be known if he exists.

Some critiques of pure agnosticism provide an additional dimension by focusing upon the practical implications of agnosticism as a world view. As Edwin A. Burt argues in Types of Religious Philosophy, pure agnosticism, when carried to its logical conclusions, leads to moral and metaphysical skepticism as

well as religious skepticism.<sup>86</sup> In addition, Colin Chapman in Christianity on Trial contends that pure agnosticism creates an unlivable vacuum of truth, and that adherents attempt to fill this vacuum with "truth-substitutes" or experience in order to retain a sense of significance and value.<sup>87</sup>

### Monism

The rediscovery of Eastern (particularly Indian) culture and the promulgation of Eastern thought in the West has stimulated monistic or pantheistic thinking in Western culture. Monistically oriented philosophies of religion (e.g., William S. Morgan, The Philosophy of Religion<sup>88</sup>) that stress the unitary conception of the universe and the ascent of the human soul to unity with the infinite have been appearing in recent years, and some, like the twenty-five books of Alan Watts, have been quite influential.

Essential to pantheistic theory is the concept held by Spinoza that personality is incompatible with the idea of the absolute.<sup>89</sup> Theists argue that the finite limitations of personality are not to be ascribed to God and that the

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<sup>86</sup>Burtt, Types, pp. 197-235.

<sup>87</sup>Colin Chapman, Christianity on Trial (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1975), pp. 64-85, 173-74.

<sup>88</sup>William S. Morgan, The Philosophy of Religion (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950).

<sup>89</sup>Alexander Balmain Bruce, Apologetics; or, Christianity Defensively Stated, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1892), p. 80.

personal attributes of intellect, emotion, and will are superior to the negation of these qualities in the impersonal.

In The Dust of Death, Christian apologist Os Guinness critiques monism on the epistemological, metaphysical, and moral levels. Epistemologically, monism has a fundamental problem with the world of diversity. Guinness writes that "Monism as related to reality does not give a sufficient basis on which to ground continuing scientific investigation or to distinguish between fantasy and reality."<sup>90</sup> Metaphysically, monism denies the ontological status of personal beings, leading to a metaphysical depersonalization that provides no answer for man's search for significance and meaning. Morally, monism teaches that there are no moral absolutes, leading to a complete relativism and resignation.<sup>91</sup> Christian theism, on the other hand, provides a basis for unity and diversity, personal worth, and moral absolutes.

Apologist David K. Clark contrasts the monistic and theistic world views in The Pantheism of Alan Watts. Clark argues that "the pantheist, when he appeals to mystical epistemology, assumes and uses the laws of logic in the very process of denying their validity, and therefore faces self-defeat whenever he

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<sup>90</sup>Os Guinness, The Dust of Death (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 215.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., pp. 220-25.

makes an allegedly meaningful affirmation."<sup>92</sup> An epistemological system that repudiates logic can affirm nothing meaningful about reality.<sup>93</sup> Yet teachers of monistic philosophies like Zen cannot, apart from silence, avoid the attempt to impart cognitive content.

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<sup>92</sup>David K. Clark, The Pantheism of Alan Watts (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1978), p. 98.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.,p. 99.

### Dualism

Zoroastrianism is a classic expression of religious dualism because it postulates two coeternal opposites in continual conflict. The dualism inherent in Manichaeism, however, focuses on spirit versus matter. In both cases, there is a tendency to maintain that the good will somehow triumph over the evil, and this, of course, means that these systems are not consistently dualistic. Geddes MacGregor comments on the breakdown of dualism in his Introduction to Religious Philosophy:

Indeed, it would seem that as soon as we so divide the universe into two parts or sides, we establish the superiority of one over the other. If one is better than the other, why have the other at all? It would seem that it ought to be discarded.<sup>94</sup>

The dilemma in dualism is sometimes presented in terms of an absolutely irresistible force coming in conflict with an absolutely immovable object. If the force cannot move the object, it is no longer irresistible. If the object can be moved, it is no longer immovable.

### Deism

Although no longer a dominant world view, deism was a significant philosophical movement in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because of its strong emphasis on the rational character of God and the universe. Deism was unstable because it essentially occupied a transitional status between theism and naturalism. While deism maintains that God created the universe, it denies any

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<sup>94</sup>MacGregor, Religious Philosophy, p. 72.

supernatural intervention in the universe because of its stress on the inviolability of natural law. Antisupernaturalism, unitarianism, and skepticism with respect to special revelation make deism inimical to historical Christianity.

To a certain extent, rationalistic apologists commend the deistic use of natural revelation and human reason, but they contend that these sources of knowledge are inherently limited. They also criticize the inconsistency of the deistic negation of the miraculous in view of its acceptance of the miracle of an ex nihilo creation. And since deism allows the personality of the Creator, its rejection of personal communication from God to man is unfounded. Apologists also note that deism is an impracticable world view on the levels of human significance and morality. The transcendence of the deistic God is accentuated to the extent of eclipsing divine immanence, leading, in effect, to an impersonal and mechanistic universe.

#### Naturalism

The naturalistic world view that nature is the sum of reality and that the cosmos "exists as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system"<sup>95</sup> is closely associated with the scientific mentality that rules out the supernatural in the name of science. Theists argue that scientific methodology is useful for gaining a great deal of knowledge, but by its nature cannot provide knowledge in the realms of axiology or metaphysics. Scientism illicitly equates outward

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<sup>95</sup>Sire, The Universe, p. 62.

description with inner explanation<sup>96</sup> and attempts to draw conclusions about ultimate reality that are beyond the limits of scientific inquiry.

Christian apologists challenge the coherence of the naturalistic world view on several levels. The assumption that nature is eternal and self-generating is scientifically unfounded, especially in view of evidence (e.g., the big-bang theory) that the universe is not infinitely old. The closed and impersonal universe of naturalism also provides no real basis for human significance and morality because it furnishes no final reference point. If morality and consciousness are epiphenomena of chance processes, the validity of human rationality is called into question and the system becomes self-defeating. Since naturalism is opposed to the possibility of the miraculous, apologists address this issue by maintaining that natural laws are descriptive, not prescriptive, and that the question of whether these laws can be superseded by a higher agency cannot be settled by science.

#### Humanism

The concept of humanism, religious or secular, has become a broad umbrella, but the basic position is that there is something sacrosanct about the human species, and that the highest good of man is to pursue the development of the human consciousness, personality, and potential. Humanism incorporates naturalistic assumptions but places a greater stress on human aspirations and

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<sup>96</sup>Williams, Faith, p. 69.

dignity. Christian apologists agree that human values are significant, but they question whether the metaphysical underpinnings of humanism provide any basis for human dignity.

The humanistic belief in progress, in science as the means of progress, and in the self-sufficiency of man<sup>97</sup> is examined against the backdrop of twentieth-century culture by a number of Christian apologists who conclude that humanism is neither coherent nor comprehensive as a world view. It fails to provide a foundation for human significance, the fulfillment of human aspirations, and healing of individual and social alienation.<sup>98</sup> In The Arrogance of Humanism, David Ehrenfeld lists several untestable assumptions made by humanists. The principal assumption is that all problems are soluble by people. The secondary assumptions include:

Many problems are soluble by technology.

Those problems that are not soluble by technology, or by technology alone, have solutions in the social world (of politics, economics, etc.).

When the chips are down, we will apply ourselves and work together for a solution before it is too late.

Some resources are infinite; all finite or limited resources have substitutes.

Human civilization will survive.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>Guinness, Dust, pp. 15-16.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-39.

<sup>99</sup>David Ehrenfeld, The Arrogance of Humanism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 16-17.

Christian apologists challenge each of these assumptions, especially the first. They maintain that "real progress toward the essential betterment of humanity [can] be attained only by reconciliation to The Other that is beyond humanity and the Source of whatever good humanity can ever hope to achieve."<sup>100</sup> More recently, some apologists have critiqued the extension of humanism into what is sometimes called the "new consciousness," a syncretistic and eclectic world view that centers on the directed evolution of humanity through altered states of consciousness.<sup>101</sup>

#### Existentialism

The focus of existentialism is on self-determinacy and the conscious creation of value in an otherwise absurd cosmos. For the existentialist, existence precedes essence, and one is authenticated by the freedom of subjective choice. But apologists contend that choices in the absence of real criteria are meaningless. Paul C. Vitz writes in Psychology as Religion that criteria cannot be avoided in practice, but a consistent existentialism cannot allow the acceptance of any a priori or externally valid principles because of the absurdity of existence.<sup>102</sup> Vitz adds that "the existentialist violates the principle of complete absurdity and escapes nihilism by assuming that the self, the process of

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<sup>100</sup>MacGregor, Religious Philosophy, p. 64.

<sup>101</sup>Sire, The Universe, pp. 150-203.

becoming, and some other values (criteria) are valid and not totally meaningless.<sup>103</sup>

Apologists also object that existentialists are unable to define or defend the goal of self-actualization and the meaning of the authentic self. When the locus of morality is placed in individual subjectivity, there is no objective basis for distinguishing a choice as moral or immoral.

#### Panentheism

Panentheism or process theology holds that God is to the world as a soul is to a body. The philosophical basis for the process thought was developed in part by Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. Nelson Pike and Schubert M. Ogden are among those who have developed the theological and biblical implications of process theology. Rationalistic apologists commend process theology's emphasis on metaphysics, the importance of natural revelation, and the immanence of God in the world, but they criticize this world view on several levels. They reject the bipolar concept of God (the idea that there is an actual temporal pole and a potential eternal pole in God) as inadequate because a potential cannot actualize itself. "A bipolar process God would be no

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<sup>102</sup>Paul C. Vitz, Psychology as Religion (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 52.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

more than a big creature that needs grounding<sup>104</sup> in a truly ultimate and real cause, that is, the God of theism. Apologists also note that bipolar theism is based upon the false assumption that God must be static in essence or dynamic in subsistence. They argue that immutability is necessary in God's essence if he is absolute, but that essential immutability does not preclude relational and personal dynamic.

The finite God of panentheism provides an inadequate answer to the problem of evil. Apologists offer several reasons for this, including the fact that such a God could never guarantee the achievement of a better world, and that this questionable growth in value cannot be justified in light of the human suffering necessary to attain it.<sup>105</sup> Apologists deny that the panentheistic God is the God of the Bible and refute process theology's criticisms of traditional theism.

### Nihilism

Apologists regard nihilism as the logical conclusion of naturalism. The naturalistic concept of a closed and impersonal universe without any absolutes in which death is extinction provides no basis for significant action. In such a reality, man is reduced to a machine and deprived of self-determination. This also leads to epistemological nihilism, the questioning of the validity of human

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<sup>104</sup>Stanley N. Gundry and Alan F. Johnson, eds., Tensions in Contemporary Theology (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), p. 277.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., pp. 278-79.

reasoning and of the distinction between fact and fantasy. It also leads to ethical relativism, the Dostoevskian concept that if God is dead, everything is permitted.

It is true that most naturalists are not nihilists, but apologists contend that this is because they have not consistently examined the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical implications of naturalism. In addition, they argue that no one can live consistently as a nihilist. Like everyone else, nihilists affirm the use of logic whenever they communicate. The statement that everything is meaningless assumes the validity of the law of contradiction and is therefore self-defeating.<sup>106</sup> Nor can the nihilist avoid the pursuit of meaning, purpose, and significance in areas like personal goals, artistic endeavors (even when minimalistic), and relationships. The despair of nihilism is that no one can live like a machine in a determined or capricious world.

### Theism

Christian apologists defend the consistency, coherence, and comprehensiveness of the theistic world view. They also argue that it alone provides an absolute foundation for metaphysics, epistemology, and morality, and a basis for the fulfillment of human personal worth needs like love and acceptance, significance and identity, and competence and achievement. In The Universe Next Door, Sire lists and discusses eight theistic propositions:

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<sup>106</sup>Arlie J. Hoover, Ideas and their Consequences (Abilene, Texas: Biblical Research Press, 1976), pp. 60-65.

1. God is infinite and personal (Triune), transcendent and immanent, omniscient, sovereign and good.
2. God created the cosmos ex nihilo to operate with a uniformity of cause and effect in an open system.
3. Man is created in the image of God and thus possesses personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, gregariousness, and creativity.
4. God can and does communicate with man.
5. Man was created good, but through the Fall the image of God became defaced, though not so ruined as not to be capable of restoration; through the work of Christ God redeemed man and began the process of restoring man to goodness, though any given man may choose to reject that redemption.
6. For man death is either the gate to life with God and his people or the gate to eternal separation from the only thing that will ultimately fulfill man's aspirations.
7. Ethics is transcendent and is based on the character of God as good (holy and loving).
8. History is linear, a meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God's purposes for man.<sup>107</sup>

Apologists contend that these propositions alone provide an ultimate basis for morality, meaning, worth, and purpose in human life, and that regardless of their world views, people live as though these qualities are real.

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<sup>107</sup>Sire, The Universe, pp. 24-40.

## CHAPTER 3

### RECENT RATIONALIST APOLOGISTS

Once again, it must be stressed that those who employ the rationalistic method of Christian apologetics as defined in this study are not thereby strict rationalists in their approach to knowledge. Instead, this term means that their apologetic methods are predominantly characterized by the development of a rational case for Christian theism rather than by an appeal to Christian evidences.

#### C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis did not develop a specific apologetic system but approached the claims of Christianity from several directions. In his directly apologetic writings, however, Lewis sought to demonstrate that Christianity provides a better basis for epistemology, morality, historical perspective, and human experience than any other world view.

Lewis recognized the extent to which a person's perception of experience is colored by metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions, even when these are not consciously recognized. Thus, his apologetic approach is characterized more by rationalism than by evidentialism. After stating that experience alone cannot settle the question of whether miracles occur, Lewis wrote in Miracles: A Preliminary Study, "What we learn from experience depends on the kind of philosophy we bring to experience. It is therefore useless

to appeal to experience before we have settled, as well as we can, the philosophical question."<sup>108</sup>

One recurrent theme in Lewis's apologetic books and essays is his argument for the existence of a supernatural reality from the nature of thought. Such a reality must be implicitly assumed in order to think and act above the level of mere impulse. "In order to think we must claim for our own reasoning a validity which is not credible if our own thought is merely a function of our brain, and our brains a by-product of irrational physical processes."<sup>109</sup> According to Lewis, all knowledge depends upon the validity of inference; one starts from thought and infers matter. For this inferential process to be valid, it must correspond to a universe that is not alien to reason: "Unless all that we take to be knowledge is an illusion, we must hold that in thinking we are not reading rationality into an irrational universe but responding to a rationality with which the universe has always been saturated."<sup>110</sup>

Similarly, Lewis appeals to the nature of morality in an argument for the existence of a supremely moral being as the grounding for moral experience. He contends that morality transcends mere instinct, impulse, or social

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<sup>108</sup>C. S. Lewis, Miracles: A Preliminary Study (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948), p. 11.

<sup>109</sup>Idem, "Miracles," in God in the Dock, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 27.

convention, and that there are transcultural and transtemporal moral values (what Lewis calls "the Tao" in The Abolition of Man).<sup>111</sup> Regardless of personal philosophies, everyone lives as though there are real rights and wrongs in what they approve and condemn. This behavior, Lewis argues, only has true validity in a theistic universe.<sup>112</sup> People cannot act as though mercy and justice are private whims with subjective and impersonal roots.

Lewis deals extensively with the problem of evil and argues, contrary to dualism, that "evil is a parasite, not an original thing."<sup>113</sup> In The Problem of Pain, he employs the free-will theodicy in a discussion of the relationship of divine omnipotence, goodness, and love to human wickedness, human and animal pain, hell, and heaven.<sup>114</sup> He also contends that antitheistic arguments based upon the problem of evil are actually self-defeating because they must appeal, in effect, to absolute moral standards before they can condemn evil:

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<sup>110</sup>Idem, "De Futilitate," in Christian Reflections, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 65; cf. pp. 57-73; also cf. "Bulverism," in God in the Dock, pp. 271-77.

<sup>111</sup>Idem, Abolition, 29-91; cf. "On Ethics" and "The Poison of Subjectivism," in Christian Reflections, pp. 44-56, 74-81.

<sup>112</sup>Idem, Mere Christianity (New York: Macmillan Company, 1943, 1945, 1952), pp. 17-46.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 50; cf. "Evil and God," in God in the Dock, pp. 21-24.

<sup>114</sup>Idem, The Problem of Pain (New York: Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 26-154.

Unless we take our own standard of goodness to be valid in principle (however fallible our particular applications of it) we cannot mean anything by calling waste and cruelty evils. And unless we take our own standard to be something more than ours, to be in fact an objective principle to which we are responding, we cannot regard that standard as valid. In a word, unless we allow ultimate reality to be moral, we cannot morally condemn it.<sup>115</sup>

Thus, it is on the basis of human rationality and morality that Lewis refutes naturalism. The spiritual is not derived from the natural; the natural is derived from the spiritual.<sup>116</sup> Lewis argues that nature points beyond itself to a higher reality for its creation and sustenance, and that the laws of nature are descriptive but not prescriptive of what can and cannot happen. Nature is consistent and systematic, but this does not preclude unique events in which the ordinary processes of nature are divinely superseded for specific purposes. In a theistic universe, miracles can occur, and the "various reports which claim that this super- or extra-natural reality has sometimes invaded and disturbed the sensuous content of space and time which makes our 'natural' world" should be

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<sup>115</sup>Idem, "De Futilitate," pp. 69-70; cf. "The Pains of Animals," in God in the Dock, pp. 170-71.

<sup>116</sup>Idem, "Transposition," in The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), pp. 16-29; cf. Miracles, pp. 17-33, 46-55, 98-102; "The Laws of Nature," "Religion Without Dogma?" and "Two Lectures," in God in the Dock, pp. 76-79, 136-38, 210-11. While not opposed to the scientific theory of evolution which deals with change within limits, Lewis takes issue with what he calls the myth of popular evolutionism. "In the science, Evolution is a theory about changes: in the Myth it is a fact about improvements" ("The Funeral of a Great Myth," in Christian Reflections, p. 85).

approached with an open mind and evaluated on their own merits rather than rejected out of hand.<sup>117</sup>

Lewis's best known apologetic work is called Mere Christianity, really a combination of three books (The Case for Christianity, Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality). In it, he refutes atheism, naturalism, and dualism, and presents a case for the unique claims of Christ. Lewis states that in view of these claims, there are only three options:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg--or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.<sup>118</sup>

There is another aspect of Lewis's apologetic which is less rationalistic and reflects his literary penchant. The Pilgrim's Regress, for example, makes use of an allegorical approach to treat many of the issues associated with the philosophy of religion.<sup>119</sup> Surprised by Joy is a biographical apologetic which develops the experience of intense longing for the transcendent (what Lewis calls

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<sup>117</sup>Idem, "Miracles," p. 27.

<sup>118</sup>Idem, Mere Christianity, p. 56; cf. "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?" in God in the Dock, pp. 156-60.

<sup>119</sup>Idem, The Pilgrim's Regress (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1933).

sehnsucht).<sup>120</sup> His three-volume space trilogy (Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, and That Hideous Strength) and seven-volume The Chronicles of Narnia vindicate the Christian world view through fiction in a way that is radically different from his more directly apologetic works.<sup>121</sup>

#### Edward John Carnell

Carnell, often called a "verificationist," sought to avoid the extremes of pure rationalism and empiricism. He approached Christianity and other world views as hypotheses and sought to test their truth claims by a dual criterion he called "systematic consistency." His Introduction to Christian Apologetics develops the two aspects of systematic consistency ("horizontal self-consistency" and "vertical fitting of the facts") and applies them to the Christian hypothesis to show that Christian faith is a reasonable step on the level of formal consistency and factual adequacy.<sup>122</sup>

While the logical starting point for a philosophical system is a coordinating ultimate (for the Christian, this ultimate is the Trinity), a "synoptic

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<sup>120</sup>Idem, Surprised by Joy, A Harvest Book (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1955).

<sup>121</sup>Idem, Out of the Silent Planet (New York: Macmillan Company, 1943); Perelandra (New York: Macmillan Company, 1944); That Hideous Strength (New York: Macmillan Company, 1946); The Chronicles of Narnia, 7 vols. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1950-1956).

<sup>122</sup>Carnell, Christian Apologetics, pp. 47-63, 103-12.

starting point" which verifies the logical starting point is necessary.<sup>123</sup> The imago Dei is reflected in part by the rationes aeternae (eternal concepts) which include the categories of logic, ethics, and aesthetics. Anything that purports to be a special revelation from God must be examined for consistency and comprehensiveness in the light of these rationes. A revelation must "make peace with the law of contradiction and the facts of history" before it can "deserve a rational man's assent."<sup>124</sup>

Carnell adds that faith itself is a gift of God and that it is the Holy Spirit who ultimately authenticates the word of God as true. In light of this, the task of apologetics is that of preparing the heart for faith; biblical faith must be consistent with truth, and truth must be confirmed by the test of systematic consistency.

Building upon this epistemological foundation, Carnell addresses the problem of biblical criticism, the problem of common ground in apologetics, the relationship of the Christian faith to scientific method, the problem of miracles and natural law, and the problem of evil.<sup>125</sup>

In A Philosophy of the Christian Religion, Carnell critiques the philosophical positions of hedonism, materialism, positivism (scientific empiricism), rationalism, and humanism, as well as the impersonal and finite

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid., pp. 124-25.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

gods of philosophy.<sup>126</sup> In this work he also defends the justice and mercy of God, and this ethical theme is predominant in his apologetic.<sup>127</sup> The Christian ethical system which is founded on the ethical One- and-Many of the Godhead manifests systematic consistency and provides the locus for what Carnell calls the "third method of knowing." The first two are knowledge by immediate acquaintance or experience (ontological truth) and knowledge by inference from this experience (truth as propositional correspondence to reality); the third is knowledge attained through participation in the moral and spiritual environment (knowledge of the imperative essence).<sup>128</sup> In Christian Commitment: An Apologetic, Carnell contends that universal judicial sentiments imply a standard of judgment which in turn implies an administrator of justice. Thus, the moral cycle can only be meaningful if God exists, and it is perfectly completed in the person of Jesus Christ, who as the God-man bore God's

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid., pp. 191-314.

<sup>126</sup>Idem, A Philosophy of the Christian Religion (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), pp. 49-329.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., pp. 333-90; Christian Apologetics, pp. 315-35.

<sup>128</sup>Idem, Christian Commitment: An Apologetic (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957), pp. 10-155; cf. "Becoming Acquainted with the Person of God," in The Case for Biblical Christianity, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 62-63.

judgment against human sin and in this way acts as the mediator between God and man.<sup>129</sup>

Carnell writes that "An approach to God calls for an exercise of spiritual as well as rational facilities, while a proof of God's existence calls for an exercise of only the rational. A wretched man can intellectually assent to God's existence, but only a man of character can spiritually approach God's person."<sup>130</sup> The "third method of knowing" involves a reciprocal relation between rectitude and the perception of ultimate reality. However, because of the problem of human sin, this rectitude is not spontaneously fulfilled: "Moral striving is paradoxical because we shall never love God unless we make a conscious effort; and yet because we must strive for legal righteousness, we prove that we shall never be righteous."<sup>131</sup> Only by an act of repentance in which "the guilty party despairs of finding a legal way out" will a person be in a position to receive the forgiveness and new life which has been made available through the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>132</sup> Although Carnell criticizes Kierkegaard's opposition between the rational and the moral self, he acknowledges a debt to Kierkegaard

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<sup>129</sup>Idem, Christian Commitment, pp. 91-110, 254.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., pp. 168, 212-43.

in having taught him to ask questions from the perspective of inwardness.<sup>133</sup> This perspective is reflected in Carnell's treatment of the moral and spiritual environment and in his psychologically-oriented apologetic The Kingdom of Love and the Pride of Life which focuses on Christianity's answers to human anxieties.<sup>134</sup>

#### Other Rationalist Apologists

Leonard Hodgson's The Place of Reason in Christian Apologetic illustrates the rationalistic approach to the defense of the Christian world view. For Hodgson, "the presupposition of all thought is the rationality of the universe," and the apologist's task is "the exposition of the faith and practice of the Christian Church in such a way as to provoke the response, 'Yes, that is true and rational.'"<sup>135</sup>

In his apologetic work, The Resurrection of Theism, Stuart Hackett propounds a "rational empiricism" which bases knowledge upon a synthetic a priori structure. Hackett concludes that "rationality and experience have

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. 73; cf. The Burden of Soren Kierkegaard (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965).

<sup>134</sup>Idem, The Kingdom of Love and the Pride of Life (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960).

<sup>135</sup>Leonard Hodgson, The Place of Reason in Christian Apologetic (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1925), pp. 31, 29.

together established the existence of an absolutely infinite being that transcends the world of experience and is its only sufficient explanation."<sup>136</sup>

Holmes is not unlike Carnell in his use of the three criteria of personal disclosure value, empirical fit, and logical coherence.<sup>137</sup> In Faith Seeks Understanding he argues that faith and reason are compatible, and that faith involves not only intellectual assent, but also existential response to the person of God. For Holmes, existential disclosure occurs "in the dynamic interrelation of event and context, of fact and meaning, of subject and object."<sup>138</sup> God is the source of all truth, whether philosophical, historical, scientific, moral, personal, or religious. Holmes acknowledges that deduction and induction are formally problematic, but for practical purposes, "confidence in human reason is well grounded."<sup>139</sup>

The basic principles of non-contradiction and of induction are universal and necessary for the purposes of human thought, even if they are not independently and logically necessary. Good reasoning will therefore adopt the rules and procedures those principles require. The result is not that reason can prove everything, but that we can know some things even though we "know in part" and "see through a glass darkly."<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup>Hackett, Theism, p. 203.

<sup>137</sup>Arthur F. Holmes, "The Nature of Theistic Apologetics," in Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society 2 (Spring 1959):53-57.

<sup>138</sup>Idem, Faith, p. 76.

<sup>139</sup>Idem, All Truth Is God's Truth (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 100.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., pp. 100-101.

Purtill, like Hackett and Holmes, is a professional philosopher. In his Reason to Believe he maintains that theism is the only world view that makes sense out of "the intelligibility of the universe, the felt force of the moral law, and our intimations of happiness."<sup>141</sup> He adds that while there are difficulties attending the theistic view, "the difficulties of rejecting it are insurmountable."<sup>142</sup>

In The Universe Next Door, Sire uses the criteria of inner intellectual coherence, comprehensiveness of external data, explanatory power, and subjective satisfaction to examine the truth claims of Christian theism, deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, eastern pantheistic monism, and "the new consciousness."<sup>143</sup> In this rationalistically-oriented critique, Sire concludes that apart from Christian theism, no world view "can adequately account for the possibility of genuine knowledge, the facticity of the external universe or the existence of ethical distinctions. Each in its own way ends in some form of nihilism."<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>Purtill, Reason, p. 111.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>143</sup>Sire, The Universe, pp. 208-12.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE RATIONALIST APOLOGETICS OF NORMAN L. GEISLER

Norman Geisler's books in the areas of apologetics, philosophy of religion, ethics, and biblical studies have made him a key figure in Christian apologetics. Though he would not consider himself a rationalist, the apologetic method he has developed fits the definition and description of rationalistic apologetics given previously in this study. Geisler, in effect, builds a rational case for Christian theism by demonstrating how it conforms to criteria used to evaluate the truth claims of competing world views.

#### Philosophy of Religion

Geisler's approach to religious philosophy is explicated in Ethics: Alternatives and Issues (1971),<sup>145</sup> Philosophy of Religion (1974),<sup>146</sup> The Roots of Evil (1978),<sup>147</sup> and Introduction to Philosophy (1980).<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup>Norman L. Geisler, Ethics: Alternatives and Issues (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971).

<sup>146</sup>Idem, Philosophy of Religion (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974).

<sup>147</sup>Idem, The Roots of Evil (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978).

<sup>148</sup>Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, Introduction to Philosophy (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980).

## Religious Experience

His Philosophy of Religion begins with a discussion of the nature, characteristics, dimensions, and reality of religious experience. The nature of the religious experience is tied to an awareness of the transcendent, an object of ultimate concern or total commitment which is beyond the level of immediate consciousness.<sup>149</sup> Geisler differentiates religious experience from moral, aesthetic, and secular experience. While moral experience is related to religious experience, the latter is distinguishable by its broader scope, the kind of commitment it produces, the higher order of its object, and its power to overcome failure and guilt. On the level of aesthetic experience, Geisler maintains that both the object and the nature of an aesthetic experience differ from those of a religious experience in that the former produces wonder and admiration while the latter leads to worship and adoration. Secular experience falls short of religious experience because it does not recognize the transcendent or because it is unwilling to commit to it.

In his development of the sphere of the transcendent, Geisler does not limit the meaning of transcendence to personal theistic concepts or even pantheistic or impersonal modes of describing the goal of religious aspiration.<sup>150</sup> Transcendence requires a real or imagined Beyond toward which religious experience moves. Geisler uses Ian Ramsey's concept of "total commitment" and

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<sup>149</sup>Geisler, Philosophy of Religion, pp. 14-16.

Paul Tillich's concept of "ultimate concern" to further develop the characteristics of religious experience. His typology of religious transcendence involves seven directions. The first is backward, transcending toward the beginning. Mircea Eliade's The Sacred and the Profane and Myth and Reality are used to illustrate this retrospective transcendence through myths or origin.<sup>151</sup> The second direction is upward, a vertical transcendence achieved by "leaving the lower world of shadows and images and ascending to the world of pure forms above."<sup>152</sup> As illustrated in the Enneads of Plotinus, the process of transcending upward moves from the sensible to the intellectual to the intuitional to unity with the Supreme. The third direction is outward, a transcendence beyond the circumference of human experience. Bultmannian demythologizing of the God "up there" or "out there" led to a fourth direction which is forward, an eschatological transcendence in the forward movement of God in history. Thomas Altizer in his Radical Theology and the Death of God wrote that man "must move forward beyond the death of a primordial or original sacred to an eschatological coincidentia oppositorum that reconciles and unites the sacred

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., pp. 43-45.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-46.

and the profane."<sup>153</sup> The fifth direction is inward, a transcending toward the mystical center. This is illustrated in The Divine Milieu by Teilhard de Chardin who spoke of God as "a universal milieu," the "ultimate point upon which all realities converge," the center of the universe.<sup>154</sup> The sixth direction is downward, a transcending toward the depth or ground of being. This is illustrated by John A. T. Robinson's emphasis on the transcendent within human experience in his Honest to God. The seventh direction is in a circle, a transcendence by eternal recurrence as illustrated in Nietzsche, and a transcendence by eternal absurdity as illustrated in Camus.

Geisler emphasizes that "the history of mankind, sacred or secular, supports the thesis that by nature man has an irresistible urge to transcend himself."<sup>155</sup> He then proceeds to test the reality of religious experience, defining reality as more than a subjective condition of human experience, a projection of human imagination, an object of wish fulfillment, or a subconscious force in human experience. Reality means to have an independent and objective existence. In discussing the need for verification, Geisler addresses Kierkegaard's objection against attempts to demonstrate the reality of God and

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<sup>153</sup>Thomas Altizer and M. Hamilton, Radical Theology and the Death of God (New York: Bobbs-Merill, 1960), p. 151, quoted in Geisler, Philosophy of Religion, pp. 54-55.

<sup>154</sup>Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), p. 114, quoted in Geisler, Philosophy of Religion, p. 57.

<sup>155</sup>Geisler, Philosophy of Religion, pp. 63-64.

seeks to bridge the gap between fideists and verificationists by drawing a distinction between the basis for believing that God exists and the basis for committing oneself to God. He acknowledges that "It is unworthy of God (if there is a God) to believe in Him for the sake of the evidence. For if there is an ultimate value in the universe, then it ought to be believed in for its own sake."<sup>156</sup> Nevertheless, he argues that verification is necessary to discern whether there really is a God to fulfill the human need for ultimate commitment. This need for the transcendent is illustrated in Freud, Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Tillich, Sartre, Beckett, Kafka, Nietzsche, Hume, and Kant. The premise that "what men really need really exists" is based on the experience of human expectations and the fulfillability of needs. Geisler contends that "Some men may think that there are real but unfulfillable needs, but few men (if any) will really believe it, and no man can consistently live it."<sup>157</sup> Atheism admits the human need to transcend but allows no object to fulfill this need. But unless people are being totally deceived, critical experience according to Geisler requires a reality basis for at least some religious experience.

### Theistic Proofs

In a section of Philosophy of Religion called "God and Reason," Geisler examines the function of theistic proofs by responding to five modern objections

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

to such proofs. Answering the objection that proofs are psychologically unconvincing, he states that there is a difference between proof and persuasion; lack of persuasion results from a lack of cooperation between the will and the mind. Other objections are that proofs are logically invalid, epistemologically defective, ontologically inadequate, and axiologically misplaced. Geisler argues that actual truth is more fundamental than formal validity, and that any aprioristic reasoning that denies that reality can be known is self-defeating. The rationally inescapable is real because the only logical alternatives to a noncontradictory view are contradictory. Geisler uses affirmability and undeniability as criteria of demonstration, maintaining that "the theist need not be concerned about showing that God's nonexistence is inconceivable but only that it is undeniable. After all, what the theist seeks is not mere rational inconceivability but existential undeniability. That is, the theist seeks a necessary Being, not a necessary Thought at the end of his argument."<sup>158</sup> Geisler is opposed to theistic fideism, contending instead that theism can be built upon a reasonable base.

Concerning the teleological argument, Geisler evaluates the proofs of William Paley, R. E. D. Clark, and F. R. Tennant and the rebuttals of David Hume, John Stuart Mill, Immanuel Kant, and Bertrand Russell. He concludes that while the teleological argument can be granted some weight, it falls short as

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<sup>158</sup>Ibid., pp. 100-01.

a demonstrative theistic proof. The argument supports the probability of prior intelligence behind the design in the universe, and favors the unity of this cause. The principle of causality is part of the teleological argument, and because of this, Geisler emphasizes that it depends upon the cosmological argument. He draws a similar conclusion with respect to the moral arguments for the existence of God, after examining those of Kant, Hastings Rashdall, W. R. Sorley, Elton Trueblood, and C. S. Lewis, because all of these approaches assume the principle of causality. If the validity of this principle is granted, the moral proofs for God have weight in the sense of demonstrating that moral experience requires the existence of a supreme and perfect Mind in order to be valid and ultimately meaningful. Nevertheless, this is not a rationally inescapable proof.

Geisler's analysis of the antitheistic moral arguments based on the problem of evil that have been raised by Pierre Bayle, Bertrand Russell, Albert Camus, and others leads to the conclusion that they are doomed to failure in that they "must assume some standard of justice beyond the world by which the situation is judged to be un-just, i.e., not-just."<sup>159</sup> An ultimate standard of justice must be assumed in order to affirm that the system is ultimately unjust.

Concerning the ontological argument, Geisler concludes that "No valid ontological proof has been given that makes it rationally inescapable to conclude

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

that there is a necessary Being."<sup>160</sup> His detailed critique of the ontological argument includes Anselm's two ontological proofs and Gaunilo's objections, Aquinas' objection, Descartes' formulation and debates with Caterus and Gassendi, Leibniz' and Spinoza's formulations, the objections of Hume and Kant, Findlay's ontological disproof of God, and the restatements by Hartshorne and Malcolm. Aprioristic argumentation based on predictability and inconceivability are invalid because it is logically possible that nothing ever existed including God. The undeniability that something exists is the basis for a posteriori rather than a priori argumentation, and this leads to the cosmological arguments.

Geisler criticizes the various cosmological arguments as presented by Plato, Aristotle, Anselm, Alfarabi, Avicenna, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Descartes, Leibniz, Wolff, and Richard Taylor and concludes that none of them are immune to the criticisms of Hume and Kant. These are not rationally inescapable arguments because they depend upon the principle of sufficient reason which can be denied without contradiction. In addition, they import premises that move them into the conceptual realm of logical possibility rather than actual contingency. But Geisler believes that there is a way to restate the cosmological argument so that it cannot be overthrown by the standard objections, because it is based upon existential undeniability rather than the principle of sufficient reason or rational inescapability. His argument is a modification of the basic

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<sup>160</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

form which can be derived from the first four arguments of Aquinas. In his Philosophy of Religion his restated cosmological argument has six premises:

1. Some limited, changing being(s) exist.
2. The present existence of every limited, changing being is caused by another.
3. There cannot be an infinite regress of causes of being.
4. Therefore, there is a first Cause of the present existence of these beings.
5. The first Cause must be infinite, necessary, eternal, simple, unchangeable and one.
6. This first uncaused Cause is identical with the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>161</sup>

In his Christian Apologetics, these premises are expanded to ten:

1. Some things undeniably exist (e.g., I cannot deny my own existence).
2. My nonexistence is possible.
3. Whatever has the possibility not to exist is currently caused to exist by another.
4. There cannot be an infinite regress of current causes of existence.
5. Therefore, a first uncaused cause of my current existence exists.
6. This uncaused cause must be infinite, unchanging, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-perfect.
7. This infinitely perfect Being is appropriately called "God."
8. Therefore, God exists.
9. This God who exists is identical to the God described in the Christian Scriptures.
10. Therefore, the God described in the Bible exists.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>162</sup>Idem, Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 238-39.

Geisler explicates and defends each of these premises in detail and examines them in light of the objections that apply to the Leibnizian type of cosmological argument. There are fifteen of these objections:

1. Only a finite cause need be inferred from finite effects.
2. The words "necessary Being" have no consistent meaning.
3. There is no way to establish the principle of causality.
4. Theistic arguments convince few, usually only those who like abstract reasoning.
5. An infinite series is possible.
6. The cosmological argument depends on the invalid ontological argument.
7. Existential statements are not logically necessary.
8. What is rationally necessary is not ontologically necessary.
9. The cosmological argument leads to metaphysical contradictions.
10. The conclusion of the argument does not prove a theistic God.
11. There is an equivocation on the word "cause" in the argument.
12. The universe as a whole does not need a cause, only the parts do.
13. The universe is mutually dependent and does not need a cause beyond it.
14. There is no need for a here-and-now cause of existence.
15. The act-potency or contingent-necessity models are arbitrarily imposed on experience.<sup>163</sup>

Geisler systematically argues that none of these objections validly apply to his restated cosmological argument and concludes that while his argument is not rationally inescapable, it is existentially undeniable. In effect, his argument states that "if any finite being exists, then an infinite Being exists as an actual and necessary ground for finite being."<sup>164</sup> In his Introduction to Philosophy, Geisler offers a simplified version of his argument from contingent being to a Necessary

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<sup>163</sup>Geisler, Philosophy of Religion, pp. 208-23.

Being. This Necessary Being cannot be the observed universe, because it is changing, limited, and therefore contingent. The argument requires the existence of "an eternal, uncaused something which is more than all the finite parts of the universe and is the cause upon which they are dependent."<sup>165</sup> He goes on to argue that this Necessary Being is infinite, personal, and good.

### Religious Language

Concerning the problem of religious language, Geisler critically evaluates the three basic views that it is equivocal, univocal, and analogical, and concludes that there is an element of truth in each of these approaches which can be combined into a meaningful whole. The via negativa is illustrated in Plato's differentiation by ontological negation, Plotinus' negation by intuition of the Beyond-Being, and Maimonides' negative attributes of God. Geisler maintains that every negation implies a prior affirmation, and that a totally negative God-talk is meaningless.<sup>166</sup> On the other hand, some kind of negation is necessary in view of divine transcendence. "Unless all plurality, change, and finitude are eliminated from God, the theist falls into pure anthropomorphism or semantical idolatry."<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>165</sup>Idem, Introduction to Philosophy, p. 303.

<sup>166</sup>Idem, Philosophy of Religion, p. 266.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid.

The positive knowledge of God which is implied by negative God-talk requires univocal understanding to avoid a descent into religious skepticism. Geisler develops Duns Scotus' arguments for univocal concepts of God and follows this with an analysis of the Thomistic contention for analogous predication. Because God cannot possess perfections in the same way created things possess them, univocal predication would obliterate the ontological distinction between the Creator and the creation. But the Thomistic rejection of univocal predication need not lead to skepticism, because there is a way to reconcile Scotism and Thomism. This requires a distinction between a concept and a predication; divine perfections must be univocally understood as Scotus argued, but they must be analogically predicated as Thomas argued. The definition of an attribute that applies to both God and creatures must be the same, but the application of it differs.<sup>168</sup> Geisler maintains with Aquinas that finite concepts do not necessitate finite predications.

In a chapter on model religious language, Geisler examines the contemporary use of qualified models grounded in empiricism. After looking at the linguistic silence of Wittgenstein, the verificational principle of A. J. Ayer, the semantical atheism of Paul Van Buren, the qualified disclosure models of Ian Ramsey, and the metaphysical model of Frederick Ferré, he concludes that these

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<sup>168</sup>Ibid., pp. 280, 288.

models are not univocal or analogical but equivocal. As such they do not provide meaningfully descriptive knowledge of God.

According to Geisler, religious language must not only be descriptive but also evocative. The language of revelation must include the propositional but also must evoke a response to the transcendent God.<sup>169</sup>

### The Problem of Evil

in his Philosophy of Religion, The Roots of Evil, and Introduction to Philosophy, Geisler considers three ways to relate God and evil. The first affirms the existence of evil and denies the existence of God, the second denies the reality of evil and affirms the reality of God, and the third seeks to explain how both can exist. The first of these alternatives, atheism, argues that if God exists, he is not essentially good, that he should destroy all evil, that God and evil are logically incompatible, and that God and evil are practically incompatible. Other atheistic arguments based on the problem of evil are that theists use a double standard with respect to the goodness of God, that a good God would not create a world that would sin, that this is not the best of all possible worlds, and that a good God would save all men. Geisler responds to each of these objections and relates them to the implications of a world where moral creatures have been given the freedom to make real choices, and to the concept that if an all-perfect, all-powerful God does exist, there is a good purpose for evil. He adds that although

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<sup>169</sup>Idem, Introduction to Philosophy, p. 319.

"this is not the best of all possible worlds, it is the best of all possible ways to get to the best of all possible worlds."<sup>170</sup>

The second alternative is illusionism, the denial of the reality of evil. Geisler examines ancient and modern expressions of illusionism and points to the problem of the origination of the illusion of evil, the power and consistency of such an illusion, and the fact that there is no practical difference between viewing pain or evil as illusion or viewing it as actual reality.<sup>171</sup>

The third alternative affirms both God and evil. Some options in this category like dualism and sadism are incompatible with theism. After a refutation of these options, Geisler critically examines finitism, the view that God does not have the power to overcome evil; necessitarianism, the view that God was forced to create the kind of world that inevitably engendered evil; and impossibilism, the view that it was impossible for God to have foreknowledge of evil in a world of free creatures. Geisler raises logical objections to each of these options and turns to solutions to the problem of evil that are open to theism. He considers five hypothetical alternatives for theism: (1) God could have created nothing at all, (2) God could have created only beings who are not free, (3) God could have created beings who are free to sin but who did not sin, (4) God could not have created beings who are free to sin but who must sin, and (5) God could have

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<sup>170</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

<sup>171</sup>Idem, The Roots of Evil, pp. 15-18.

created beings who were free and who would sin. The third option would appear to be the most desirable, but Geisler argues that what is logically possible and even morally desirable may not be actually achievable. "The actual alternatives for theism are dictated by the kind of world we do have, not the kind of world there might have been."<sup>172</sup>

There are three dimensions to the problem of evil that theism must deal with and these are the metaphysical, the moral, and the physical aspects of the problem of evil. Concerning the metaphysical problem, Geisler appropriates the Augustinian and Thomistic solution that, "metaphysically speaking, evil has no essence or being of its own; it is a privation of the essence or being of another."<sup>173</sup> Evil is a metaphysical privation (but nevertheless a reality, not an illusion) resulting from the corruption actualized by human freedom; the free choice made by potentially corruptible creatures changed metaphysical evil from being a theoretical possibility to an actual reality.<sup>174</sup> Thus, the answer to the metaphysical problem of evil leads to the moral problem of evil, and Geisler relates this to human freedom. He argues that evil is a necessary condition and a necessary by-product of a maximally perfect moral world. After examining the alternatives available to the theistic God, Geisler concludes that "the morally best

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<sup>172</sup>Idem, Philosophy of Religion, p. 322; Introduction to Philosophy, p. 326.

<sup>173</sup>Idem, Philosophy of Religion, p. 344.

<sup>174</sup>Idem, The Roots of Evil, p. 48.

world is better than a morally good world or than no moral world at all."<sup>175</sup> His best-way-to-the-best-world theodicy looks to an eschatological verification and maintains that the present world fulfills the necessary conditions, in light of human freedom, that will lead to the best possible world. He defends in detail four components that are necessary to the achievement of an optimally perfect moral world:

. . . (1) the process leading to the final achievement of a world where men are free but never will do any evil; (2) a world wherein is permitted the full and final uncoerced exercise of moral freedom; (3) a world in which there is permitted the presence of enough evil to provide both the condition for the achievement of higher moral virtues and a comprehensive lesson of the wrongness of evil for free creatures; (4) a world where free creatures learn for themselves why evil is wrong.<sup>176</sup>

For Geisler, Christianity can be ultimately optimistic because of the assured hope that God will destroy evil in the future, rendering it null and void.<sup>177</sup>

Concerning the physical problem of evil, Geisler maintains that "all physical evil must be necessary to the moral purposes of God in granting free choice and in producing the greatest good."<sup>178</sup> In Philosophy of Religion and The Roots of Evil, he develops and defends several reasons for physical evil. Some physical evil results directly and indirectly from one's own free choices and directly and indirectly from the free choices of others. Some physical evil "may

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<sup>175</sup>Idem, Philosophy of Religion, p. 354.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>177</sup>Idem, The Roots of Evil, pp. 80-81.

be a necessary by-product of other good activities;"<sup>179</sup> some may be used by God as a warning about moral evils or as a warning of greater physical evils. Some physical evil "may be permitted as a condition of greater moral perfection;"<sup>180</sup> some occurs because higher forms of life live on lower forms. Geisler raises and responds to a number of objections to his theodicy with respect to physical evil including the implication that the end justifies the means. He contends that the issue is one of permission, not performance, and that God has utilitarian goals (the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run), but does not employ utilitarian means (doing evil that good may come). Other objections answered by Geisler include the problem of the large amount and unequal distribution of physical evil, the problem of a double standard, and the implication that it is wrong to alleviate human suffering.<sup>181</sup>

### Ethics

Geisler subscribes to a deontological rather than a teleological approach to ethics, emphasizing intrinsic more than extrinsic good, principle more than pragmatism, and norms more than ends. As opposed to a descriptive or emotive ethic, his prescriptive ethic is concerned with the question of whether there are

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<sup>178</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., p. 72; Philosophy of Religion, pp. 393-94.

<sup>180</sup>Idem, The Roots of Evil, p. 73.

<sup>181</sup>Idem, Philosophy of Religion, pp. 395-402.

any universal ethical norms. He maintains that norms are inescapable even for the utilitarian in that they are necessary to foresee, determine, and evaluate consequences. Normative statements are needed to provide formal rationality, experiential content, practicality, and objective standards by which ethical experiences can be measured as good or bad.

In his Ethics: Alternatives and Issues, Geisler critiques six approaches to normative ethics: (1) antinomianism (there are no norms), (2) generalism (there are no universal norms), (3) situationism (there is one universal norm), (4) non-conflicting absolutism (there are many non-conflicting universal norms), (5) ideal absolutism (there are many conflicting universal norms), and (6) hierarchicalism (there are hierarchically ordered universal norms).<sup>182</sup>

The antinomian approach that there are no objective norms is illustrated in the writings of Kierkegaard (transcending the ethical), Nietzsche (transvaluating the ethical), Sartre (rejection of the ethical), and A. J. Ayer (elimination of the ethical). The values in the antinomian ethic are that it stresses personal relationships and individual responsibility and takes cognizance of the emotive. Geisler's problems with this ethic are that it is too subjective, too individualistic, too relativistic, and irrational.

Generalism is illustrated in the quantitative utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham, the qualitative utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill, the general rules of G.

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<sup>182</sup>Idem, Ethics, pp. 28-136.

E. Moore, and the rule-utilitarianism of John Austin. While generalism recognizes the need for norms and offers a solution to the problem of conflicting norms, it is inadequate because of its lack of universal and non-relative norms and because utilitarian acts have no intrinsic value.

Geisler illustrates situationism with Joseph Fletcher's Situation Ethics: The New Morality. In this approach to ethics, love is placed above law as the only intrinsically good ruling norm. After discussing how Fletcher applies this norm to specific situations, Geisler acknowledges that it is a normative position, it is an absolutism, it resolves the conflict of norms issue, it gives due value to differing circumstances, and it stresses love and the value of the person. His criticisms are that one norm is too general, that the situation does not determine the meaning of love, that a different universal norm is possible, and that a many-norm ethic is defensible.

Non-conflicting absolutism is illustrated in Plato's universal ideas of morality and in Kant's categorical imperative. On the positive side, Geisler notes that pluralistic absolutism attempts to preserve moral absolutes, seeks to reconcile conflicting moral principles, and recognizes the need to define norms more precisely. His criticisms of non-conflicting absolutism include its naive acceptance of absolutes, its failure to show the interrelation of absolutes, the problem of unresolved conflicts of norms, and its lack of recognition of the priority of some norms over others.

The tenets of ideal absolutism are that there are many absolute norms and that it is wrong to break any of them. Ideally, these absolute norms do not conflict, but conflict in fact arises because of sin. In this system, ought does not imply can; doing the lesser of two evils is inevitable, excusable, and forgivable. Positive contributions of this ethical approach include the desire to preserve many absolutes and a perspective on the nature of responsibility and grace. However, Geisler calls attention to serious difficulties with ideal absolutism, for example, a tendency to legalism, a misapplication of the doctrine of depravity, and a misunderstanding of moral responsibility.

Geisler's own ethical perspective is hierarchicalism, in which universal norms are hierarchically ordered. This view "implies a pyramid of normative values which in and of themselves are objectively binding on men. But when any two or more of these values happen to conflict, a person is exempted from his otherwise binding obligation to a lower norm in view of the pre-emptory obligation of the higher norm."<sup>183</sup> Geisler develops seven principles as a guide for decision making in view of possible conflicts of value: (1) persons are more valuable than things, (2) infinite person is more valuable than finite person(s), (3) a complete person is more valuable than an incomplete person, (4) an actual person is of more value than a potential person, (5) potential persons are more valuable than actual things, (6) many persons are more valuable than few

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<sup>183</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

persons, and (7) personal acts which promote personhood are better than those which do not.<sup>184</sup> There are two principal criticisms of the hierarchical position, namely, the problem of a basis for determining the hierarchy of values and the problem of how a norm can be transcended and still be universal. Geisler defends hierarchicalism against the first criticism by developing the intuitive and revelational basis of this approach. In answer to the second criticism he contends that higher norms transcend but do not abolish lower norms, that there are exemptions from lower norms but no exceptions to them, and that absolute norms are universal only in their context.

After his defense of a hierarchicalistic approach to ethics, Geisler relates this approach to a number of ethical issues, including the role of self-love, social responsibility, war, sexual relationships, birth control and abortion, mercy-killing, suicide, capital punishment, race relationships, and ecology.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup>Ibid., pp. 115-20.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid., pp. 139-259.

### Apologetics

Geisler develops his apologetic system in Christian Apologetics (1976), "Syllabus on Christian Apologetics" (1978),<sup>186</sup> and Miracles and Modern Thought (1982).<sup>187</sup> His biblical apologetic is elaborated in A General Introduction to the Bible (1968),<sup>188</sup> A Popular Survey of the Old Testament (1977),<sup>189</sup> Inerrancy (1979),<sup>190</sup> and Decide for Yourself: How History Views the Bible (1982).<sup>191</sup>

### Apologetic Method

Geisler critically evaluates seven methodological approaches to the question of God: agnosticism, rationalism, fideism, experientialism, evidentialism, pragmatism, and combinationalism. He concludes that each of these epistemological methods makes a contribution but falls short of adequacy as a test for truth. In their place he proposes unaffirmability as the test for the

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<sup>186</sup>Idem, "Syllabus on Christian Apologetics" (class syllabus, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978).

<sup>187</sup>Idem, Miracles and Modern Thought (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982).

<sup>188</sup>Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, A General Introduction to the Bible (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968).

<sup>189</sup>Norman L. Geisler, A Popular Survey of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977).

<sup>190</sup>Idem, ed., Inerrancy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979).

<sup>191</sup>Idem, Decide for Yourself: How History Views the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982).

falsehood of a world view and undeniability as a test for the truth of a world view.

### Agnosticism

After considering the skepticism of David Hume, the agnosticism of Immanuel Kant, and the "agnosticism" of A. J. Ayer, Geisler distinguishes a weak and a strong form of agnosticism. He holds that limited agnosticism is not a threat to Christianity because it is compatible with Christianity's claim of finite knowledge of an infinite God.<sup>192</sup> Unlimited agnosticism, however, is self-defeating because it implies knowledge about reality in order to deny any knowledge about reality. Unlimited agnosticism is a form of negative dogmatism.

### Rationalism

Geisler surveys the rationalistic epistemology of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz as well as the theistic rationalism of Stuart Hackett and the revelational rationalism of Gordon Clark. The strength of rationalism, he concludes, lies in its stress on the inescapability of the law of noncontradiction, its recognition of the a priori categories of knowledge, and its emphasis on the intelligibility of reality. In spite of these positive features, Geisler maintains that the standard approaches to rationalism are deficient because of their invalid move from thought to reality, their failure to distinguish the rationally

inescapable from the real in their attempt to achieve rationally apodictic certainty, their failure to demonstrate that their first principles are rationally necessary, and the insufficiency of logic alone as a positive test for truth.

### Fideism

Geisler illustrates the fideistic position on the quest for religious truth with Pascal, Kierkegaard, Barth, and Van Til. On the positive side, fideists are correct in discarding the mathematical model of demonstrating God's existence. In addition, they correctly maintain that evidence and reason are an insufficient basis for personal commitment to God and do not induce a religious response. Faith involves a personal and volitional dimension. On the negative side, fideists cannot make valid ontological claims about God without an adequate epistemological foundation. Fideism overreacts against the propositional in its stress of the personal and fails to distinguish the basis for belief in God (the testimony and authority of God) and the warrant for belief in God (tests for truth). Without a test for truth, the unavoidable truth claims of fideists are unfounded.

### Experientialism

Plotinus, Schleiermacher, and Rudolf Otto are used by Geisler as representatives of experientialism as a test for religious truth. Experience is indeed the final court of appeal, and the content of religion must be grounded in experience. On

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<sup>192</sup>Idem, Christian Apologetics, p. 26.

the other hand, an experience cannot be used to prove the truth of that experience. "Truth finds its source in primary experience but not its substantiation."<sup>193</sup> Experience is not self-interpreting; it is capable of different interpretations. Description and interpretation of an experience requires cognitive categories that are formally independent of the experience.

### Evidentialism

Historical evidence (C. H. Dodd, Montgomery), teleological evidence (Bishop Butler, William Paley, A. E. Taylor, F. R. Tennant), and eschatological evidence (John Hick) have been used in different ways by evidentialists to establish the validity of the Christian position. Evidentialism makes a positive contribution in its emphasis on the objective and public nature of evidence, its distinction between facts and interpretation, and its factual underpinning of truth. Geisler criticizes this approach, however, because of its failure to see the contextual nature of facts. For example, evidences for the resurrection do not establish Christ's claim to be God unless a theistic universe has already been granted. Meaning is not inherent in bare facts or events without an interpretive context.

### Pragmatism

Geisler examines pragmatic approaches to meaning and truth (Charles Sanders Pierce, William James) and commends certain elements of pragmatism

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<sup>193</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

such as its emphasis on the concrete dimensions and applications of truth, the probable nature of much of our knowledge, and the role of the personal and volitional in truth. Pragmatism is an insufficient test for the truth of a world view, however, because truth may be unrelated to the consequences of an action and because long-run consequences cannot be ascertained. Furthermore, truth is more than expediency, and conflicting world views may work equally well though no two of them can be true at the same time and in the same sense.

### Combinationalism

This approach to religious truth involves the testing of a presupposed model by means of several criteria, such as consistency, coherence, and comprehensiveness. Ian Ramsey, Fredrick Ferré, and Edward J. Carnell are used to illustrate combinationalism, and Geisler recognizes a number of positive contributions of combinationalism. He approves the combinationists' use of interpretive frameworks or metaphysical models and their attempt to be comprehensive in the test for the validity of world views. But he maintains that a theistic universe must first be granted before Carnell's test of logical consistency and empirical adequacy can be applied to Christianity. "Combinationalism is at best a test only for the falsity, not the truth, of a world view."<sup>194</sup> From the beginning, the facts themselves are prefitted by the model to give meaning to the whole.

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<sup>194</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

## Unaffirmability and Undeniability

Having argued that the alternative tests for truth listed above are inadequate, Geisler proposes unaffirmability as an adequate test for the falsity, and undeniability as an adequate test for the truth of a world view: "Direct unaffirmability occurs when the statement itself provides the information to defeat itself."<sup>195</sup> Indirect unaffirmability occurs when there is no basis for the affirmation of a statement: "Any statement which negates the only basis on which it can make its affirmation (or denial) is indirectly self-defeating."<sup>196</sup>

In a similar way, Geisler distinguishes two kinds of undeniability: definitional (relating to possible realities) and existential (relating to existence or reality). The first is tautologous, like "triangles have three sides," and the second is tied into actuality: "I exist."

## Theistic Apologetics

Using the two tests of unaffirmability and undeniability, Geisler seeks to demonstrate that all nontheistic world views are directly or indirectly unaffirmable, and only theism is affirmable and undeniable. Having adjudicated between world views (deism, pantheism, panentheism, atheism, theism), he goes on to use the test of systematic consistency (combinationalism) to determine what is true within the theistic world view.

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<sup>195</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

## Deism

Geisler's exposition of the deistic world view traces the rise of deism in the work of Herbert of Cherbury, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Charles Blount, the flourishing of English deism in the work of John Toland, Anthony Cooper, Anthony Collins, William Wollaston, Thomas Woolston, and Matthew Tindal, and the decline of deism in the work of Peter Annet, Thomas Chubb, Henry Bolingbroke, Conyers Middleton, Henry Dodwell, Jr., and David Hume. He lists certain positive values that emerge from a deistic emphasis (e.g., the use of natural revelation and the stress on reason) and then refutes deism on the basis of internal and external difficulties. One of these difficulties is that it is self-defeating for deists to admit the miracle of an ex nihilo creation and then to deny that other miracles are possible. Another is that deists use an invalid mechanistic model rather than a personal model in their concept of God, and this leads to invalid conclusions regarding personal communication and intervention by God.

## Pantheism

There are several forms of pantheism, including the monism of Parmenides, the emanational pantheism of Plotinus, the modal pantheism of Spinoza, the developmental pantheism of Hegel, and the manifestational pantheism of Radhakrishnan. After a brief exposition of each of these forms, Geisler notes that pantheism is a comprehensive philosophy that focuses on the unity of reality, the immanence and absolute nature of God, and an emphasis on the *via negativa*. In spite of these positive insights, pantheism is an inadequate

world view because it is actually unaffirmable by man; it is self-defeating to claim that individual finite selves are less than real. Pantheism wrongly assumes that "whatever is not really ultimate is not ultimately or actually real"<sup>197</sup> and also fails to prove its assumption that being is to be understood univocally rather than analogically. Pantheism is also inadequate with respect to the existence of evil (its assertion that evil is an illusion and its inability to distinguish good from evil), metaphysics (the coextensiveness of God with the universe says nothing meaningful about God and is indistinguishable from atheism), and epistemology (it is self-defeating to assert that God is unknowable because this implies positive knowledge, and it is inconsistent to communicate this view of God to others).

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<sup>197</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

## Panentheism

Geisler focuses on the process panentheism of Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, John Cobb, and Shubert Ogden and acknowledges certain positive contributions of panentheistic thought. These include its emphasis on metaphysical argumentation, its avoidance of the self-defeating pantheistic identification of God with the world, its insights into the nature of God's interaction with the world, its stress on the immanence of God, and its move away from the static essentialistic Greek categories in its description of God. However, Geisler argues that panentheism's bipolar concept of God is inadequate because it requires God to actualize his own potentialities. This cannot be done without a grounding in actuality since potentialities cannot actualize themselves. The bipolar God is not absolute and is an inadequate reference point. In addition, the panentheistic theodicy with respect to the problem of evil is problematic, and panentheism's criticisms of traditional theism are mistaken.

## Atheism

The cosmological (Bertrand Russell, Jean-Paul Sartre), ontological (J. N. Findlay), and moral (Pierre Bayle, Albert Camus) disproofs of God are surveyed by Geisler along with attempted disproofs of God from the nature of creation and the nature of human freedom. He notes that the atheistic criticism of the principle of sufficient reason, self-causality, and the fallacy of understanding omnipotence as the ability to do anything are valid. However, he maintains that

causality need not lead to an infinite regress or to an impossible self-caused being, that the ontological disproof of God is self-defeating, and that the moral disproofs of God via the problem of innocent suffering do not disprove God. In addition, he argues that one must assume God in order to disprove God through a moral argument, that atheistic arguments are reversible into reasons for God, and that atheism has no adequate explanation for basic metaphysical questions.

### Theism

Geisler develops his revised cosmological argument with undeniable premises "that leads inescapably to the existence of an infinitely perfect and powerful Being beyond this world who is the current sustaining cause of all finite, changing, and contingent beings."<sup>198</sup> He examines the criticisms of a priori and a posteriori theistic arguments and argues that these criticisms are insufficient in the case of his own argument which "combines both the a priori self-evident principle of existential causality and the undeniable a posteriori fact that something exists (e.g., I exist)."<sup>199</sup>

### Christian Apologetics

Having established the validity of the theistic world view, Geisler then deals with the issues of miracles, the role of history and the establishment of the historical reliability of the New Testament, the deity and authority of Jesus

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<sup>198</sup>Ibid., p. 258.

Christ, and finally, the inspiration and authority of the Bible. Since he is shifting from judging between world views to judging within the theistic world view (e.g., Islam, Christianity, and Judaism), he moves away from the criteria of unaffirmability and undeniability to the probabilistic criterion of systematic consistency (comprehensiveness, adequacy, consistency, coherence). His argument for Christian theism takes the following form:

1. Undeniability is the only adequate test for the truth of a world view.
2. Theism is the only world view that meets the test of undeniability.
3. Therefore, theism is true.
4. In a theistic universe miracles are possible.
5. Historical events are knowable in a theistic universe.
6. Systematic consistency is the test for the truth of claims within a world view.
7. The claim that Christ's coming was a miracle is the most systematically consistent position.
8. Therefore, it is true that Christ's coming was a miracle.
9. The claim that Christ is God is the most systematically consistent view.
10. Therefore, Christ is God.
11. Christ verified that the Bible is the Word of God.<sup>200</sup>

## Miracles

In Miracles and Modern Thought, Geisler examines the standard objections to miracles.<sup>201</sup> These include Spinoza's argument that miracles are violations of natural laws, Hume's empirical skepticism, Antony Flew's

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<sup>199</sup>Ibid.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid., pp. 264-65. Parenthetical references to chapters deleted.

argument against the repeatability of miracles, Patrick Nowell-Smith's position that belief in miracles is contrary to scientific explanation, Malcolm Diamond's contention that miracles would destroy science, Flew's problem with the identifiability of miracles, and Bultmann's assertion that the miracles of the New Testament are mythological and not historical. Geisler argues that miracles are not historically unknowable, contra Flew's view of "critical history," and that the miracles of the Bible are not antinatural but supernatural events that supersede but do not contradict the processes of nature. He also answers Thomas Hobbes' contention that miracles are contrary to reason and Kant's moral argument which is based on the assumption of the universality and inviolability of natural law. Geisler maintains that biblical miracles manifest five characteristics: the unusual, the theological, the moral, the doctrinal, and the teleological.<sup>202</sup> They can be distinguished from anomalies and magic because these share only the first of these characteristics. Miracles require a theistic context because the possibility of miracles hinges on the existence of God. The arguments against miracles are essentially aprioristic because they deny in advance the theoretical and practical possibility of miracles. The issue, however, cannot be settled on a philosophical level without begging the question. If God exists, miracles are possible, but whether they have in fact occurred is a matter of history.

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<sup>201</sup>Idem, Miracles, pp. 11-154.

<sup>202</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

## Objectivism and History

There are a number of objections against the objectivity of history, including the problem of indirect access, fragmentary accounts, the need for structuring historical facts, the problem of value judgments, and the issue of historical conditioning. Geisler responds to these problems and acknowledges that world views cannot be avoided in historical interpretation. If a historian has an antinaturalistic bias, he will rule out miracles from the beginning. Meaning is determined in the context of unavoidable world views and not by the bare facts themselves.<sup>203</sup> Geisler contends that there is justification for adopting a theistic world view. Because of this, the objective meaning of history becomes possible; "within the theistic context each fact of history becomes a theistic fact."<sup>204</sup> Absolute objectivity is unattainable by finite minds but the application of systematic consistency can provide a comprehensive and consistent frame of reference for the incorporation of historical facts.

Since history is based on the sufficiency of good testimony for particular and unrepeatable events, it is improper to impose the uniformitarian methods of scientific experimentation upon historical data. Geisler rejects Troeltsch's principle of analogy and maintains that miraculous history cannot be ruled out as subjective on the basis of nonrepeatability or irregularity.

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<sup>203</sup>Idem, Christian Apologetics, p. 296.

<sup>204</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

## The Historical Reliability of the New Testament

Geisler defends the reliability of the historical New Testament accounts of the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Christ in Christian Apologetics and A General Introduction to the Bible.<sup>205</sup> This includes a discussion of the extant manuscript evidence for the New Testament, a comparison of the New Testament with ancient secular writings, and the dating of the original New Testament sources (Paul's writings, the writings of John the apostle, the synoptic gospels). Using the bibliographic evidence concerning the transmission of the New Testament, Geisler concludes that the New Testament provides authentic and primary accounts of the life of Christ.

Geisler defends not only the authenticity of the New Testament documents but also the reliability of the New Testament writers. He answers Hume's objections to the ability and integrity of the New Testament writers<sup>206</sup> and deals with the number, nature, and sanity of the eyewitnesses and writers. In his evaluation of the form criticism hypothesis, he contends that it minimizes or neglects the role of the apostles and eyewitnesses; that it is highly improbable that the early church had no biographical interests; that there is no explanation as to why details are remembered and the general outline is forgotten; that the necessary time for classification and formation of the material is not available; that the gospels are vastly different from folklore and myth; that form criticism

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<sup>205</sup>Geisler and Nix, A General Introduction, pp. 211-393.

wrongly assumes that the early church did not distinguish between Jesus' statements and their own words; that form criticism neglects the individuality and creativity of New Testament writers; and that gospel stories do not grow by accretion over the years.<sup>207</sup> Geisler also rejects the faulty memory hypothesis and outlines the archaeological and secular testimony to the accuracy of the New Testament.

#### The Deity and Authority of Jesus Christ

If miracles are possible, as Geisler has attempted to prove, and if the New Testament documents are historically reliable, a case can be made for the deity and thus the authority of Jesus Christ. Geisler examines Christ's dominical claims, including his claim to be Jehovah, his claim to be equal with God, his claim to be the Messiah, his acceptance of worship, and his request that his followers pray in his name. He also examines the claim of Jesus' disciples that he was God, including the fact that he was given the names of deity and that his name was associated with God, as well as his disciples' direct declarations of his deity and affirmations that he is the Messiah and the Creator of the universe.<sup>208</sup> Geisler maintains that these claims were substantiated in Jesus' unique

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<sup>206</sup>Geisler, Miracles, pp. 137-54.

<sup>207</sup>Idem, Christian Apologetics, pp. 316-21.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., pp. 329-39.

fulfillment of Old Testament messianic prophecy, in his sinless and miraculous life, and in his resurrection.

#### The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible

Geisler reasons that if Jesus is God, his pronouncements have divine authority.

After outlining Christ's affirmations of Old Testament authority, Geisler deals with the question of whether Christ was merely accommodating his teachings to the Jewish tradition and culture of his day. He argues against this theory, citing Jesus' empathic manner of Old Testament citation, his condemnation of false prophets, and his rebuke of false Jewish tradition and error. He also refutes the limitation theory that Jesus' human knowledge did not extend to the matter of the authority and authenticity of the Old Testament. Against this theory, Geisler uses the gospels to demonstrate that Jesus had a supernatural knowledge even as a human being and that he possessed complete authority for whatever he taught.<sup>209</sup>

In his book Decide for Yourself: How History Views the Bible, Geisler first presents the Bible's statements about itself concerning the extent of its inspiration, and in subsequent chapters compiles statements that represent the views held throughout church history on the issues of inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture. This includes the view of the Bible held by the early fathers, the medieval fathers, and the reformers, as well as what Geisler calls the

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<sup>209</sup>Ibid., pp. 357-61.

orthodox (A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield), the liberal (Harold De Wolfe, Harry Emerson Fosdick), the fundamentalist (John R. Rice), the neoorthodox (Karl Barth, Emil Brunner), the liberal-evangelical (C. S. Lewis), and the neoevangelical (G. C. Berkouwer, Jack Rogers) views of the Bible.<sup>210</sup> Geisler's own position is most clearly expressed in Inerrancy, a book he edited for the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. His chapter, "Philosophical Presuppositions of Biblical Errancy," examines the modern neoevangelical drift from the historical biblical doctrine of inerrancy and traces the current crisis in biblical authority to philosophical presuppositions derived from the inductivism of Bacon, the materialism of Hobbes, the rationalism of Spinoza, the skeptical empiricism of Hume, and the existentialism of Kierkegaard.<sup>211</sup> Geisler mentions that "contemporary neoevangelical denials of inerrancy borrow from one or more of these alien and unjustified philosophical presuppositions."<sup>212</sup>

#### Ten Issues in Apologetics

In his Varieties of Christian Apologetics, Bernard Ramm lists ten critical issues to which every apologist must speak. These ten typical problems of Christian apologetics are as follows:

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<sup>210</sup>Idem, Decide for Yourself, pp. 49-115.

<sup>211</sup>Idem, Inerrancy, pp. 305-24.

<sup>212</sup>Ibid., p. 306.

1. What is the relationship between philosophy and Christianity?
2. What is the value of theistic proofs?
3. Must the apologist work with some theory of truth?
4. What is the importance of the doctrine of sin for apologetics?
5. What is the character of revelation?
6. What kind of certainty does Christianity offer?
7. Is there a common ground between believers and unbelievers which forms a point of contact for conversation and argumentation?
8. What is the character of faith?
9. What is the status of Christian evidences?
10. What is the relationship between faith and reason?<sup>213</sup>

The major distinguishing features of Geisler's apologetic system will be summarized by a concise presentation of his approach to each of these issues.

#### The Relationship Between Philosophy and Christianity

Geisler's thinking has been greatly influenced by the work of Aquinas, and his apologetic system reflects a modified version of Thomistic philosophy. Thus he believes that Christian theology is not inimical to philosophy but can be expressed within the context of a metaphysical system. For Geisler, "philosophy serves in the construction of the Christian system and in the refutation of contrary views."<sup>214</sup> He quotes with approval C. S. Lewis's statement that "good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be

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<sup>213</sup>Bernard Ramm, Varieties of Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), pp. 17-27.

<sup>214</sup>Geisler and Feinberg, Introduction to Philosophy, p. 73.

answered."<sup>215</sup> Philosophy is the necessary prerequisite to systematic theology and to apologetics, because both require "the philosophical tools of clear, consistent, and correct thinking."<sup>216</sup> Philosophy is also necessary to the task of polemics and to the effort of communicating the Christian world view. Geisler does not believe that the "glasses" of one's non-Christian world view are cemented to one's face in the sense that they could only be removed by a supernatural conversion, but he does acknowledge that people view things according to the models or paradigms they have embraced.

One task of Christian philosophy, then, is to work on a pre-evangelistic level to get the outsider to look around the edges or through the cracks of his glasses, or to take them off and try a set of "theistic glasses" on for size. Philosophy performs the process indicated by these metaphors through philosophical argumentation.<sup>217</sup>

#### The Value of Theistic Proofs

As a neo-Thomist, Geisler maintains that there is a valid theistic proof, namely, his revised version of the cosmological argument. According to Geisler, his argument from "existential causality" is not subject to the usual objections to the cosmological argument and passes the test of undeniability. Geisler holds that Aquinas did not build his argument on the law of sufficient reason (which may be extended without contradiction to an infinite regress) but on the law of

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<sup>215</sup>C. S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 50.

<sup>216</sup>Geisler and Feinberg, Introduction to Philosophy, p. 76.

existential causality, and there cannot be an infinite regress of being. Thus, Geisler has attempted to bridge Protestant and Roman Catholic apologetics, claiming that Thomism is relevant to evangelical apologetics.<sup>218</sup> Theism "is a logical prerequisite to Christianity"<sup>219</sup> in Geisler's thought, and the reconstructed cosmological argument plays a central role in Geisler's apologetic system. This argument has not gone unchallenged,<sup>220</sup> and it is likely that Geisler's contribution to theistic argumentation will evoke considerable discussion.

### The Theory of Truth

In Geisler's apologetic system, theism is a logical prerequisite to the establishment of the validity of Christianity, and "an adequate test for truth is a methodological prerequisite to establishing theism."<sup>221</sup> There is no way to adjudicate conflicting religious and world view claims without a theory of truth that can test the validity of these claims. Geisler's negative test by which he concludes that nontheistic systems are false is direct and indirect unaffirmability.

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<sup>217</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>218</sup>Norman L. Geisler, "A New Look at the Relevance of Thomism for Evangelical Apologetics," Christian Scholars Review 4 (1975):3 and "Analogy: The Only Answer to the Problem of Religious Language," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 16 (1973):3.

<sup>219</sup>Idem, Christian Apologetics, p. 7.

<sup>220</sup>Richard A. Purdy, "Norman Geisler's Neo-Thomistic Apologetics," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 25 (1982):3.

<sup>221</sup>Geisler, Christian Apologetics, p. 7.

His positive test for truth is definitional and existential undeniability.<sup>222</sup> Geisler applies a different test when moving from judgment between world views to judgment within a world view. Having arrived at theism by the tests of affirmability and undeniability, he then uses the epistemological criterion of systematic consistency to evaluate conflicting truth claims within theism. This combinational approach, borrowed from Edward John Carnell, employs the tests of consistency, coherence, and existential relevance.

#### The Noetic Effects of Sin

Geisler's rationalistic approach to Christian apologetics makes it evident that while he does subscribe to the biblical doctrine of the fall and the concomitant problem of sin, human depravity has not substantially distorted human reason. Man is in need of the grace of God to respond to special revelation, but he is capable of responding to general revelation and can employ the rational process of existential causality to establish the existence of God.

#### The Character of Revelation

Concerning the relationship between general and special revelation, Geisler appears to take a mediating position between Protestant and Catholic apologetics. A true knowledge of God is available through general revelation, and this knowledge is analogical, not univocal or equivocal. This knowledge of the uncaused cause extends to certain attributes including infinitude,

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<sup>222</sup>Ibid., pp. 142-43.

immutability, omnipotence, omniscience, and goodness. However, Geisler does not carry this general revelation to the immortality of the soul or the establishment of an ethical system based upon natural law as does traditional Roman Catholic apologetics. For a knowledge of anything beyond basic theism, special revelation is necessary.

### The Question of Probability Versus Certainty

Because of his tests of affirmability and undeniability, Geisler maintains that the existence of God can be established beyond the level of probability. However, his test of systematic consistency, and his argument from the historical reliability of the New Testament documents to the deity of Christ and to the inspiration of Scripture based on Christ's affirmations do not lead to apodictic certainty because of the empirical limitations of this line of argument. But like many other apologists and theologians, Geisler distinguishes between certainty and certitude. Certainty "is in principle impossible when we are dealing with matters of experience, a part of which is the resurrection and our experience of saving grace."<sup>223</sup> Nevertheless, the internal witness or testimony of the Holy Spirit provides a certitude that allows an unconditional commitment to the Person of God.

### The Problem of Common Ground or Point of Contact

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<sup>223</sup>Geisler and Feinberg, Introduction to Philosophy, p. 131.

Geisler's apologetic system makes use of general revelation and the basic laws of logic as common ground with non-Christians. For him, the granting of common ground is not a compromise of God's sovereignty in favor of autonomous human reason but a reflection of the imago Dei in man.

### The Character of Faith

Faith is a response to credible evidence; the heart cannot rejoice in what the mind rejects. According to Geisler, a rational case for theism can be built, and the historical evidence supports the reliability of the biblical documents and the authority of the resurrected Christ. Faith is a volitional response to this evidence and involves not merely intellectual assent but personal commitment to the person of Christ.

### The Status of Christian Evidences

Christian evidences like prophetic fulfillment, archaeological confirmation of the veracity of Scripture, and the resurrection of Christ play a significant role in Geisler's apologetic system but only after the theistic world view has been established. He does not believe these evidences will be persuasive to those who have embraced a nontheistic philosophy. A person seeing the world through a naturalistic perspective will not accept evidences for the miraculous because naturalism does not allow for the occurrence of miracles. Nevertheless, Geisler stresses that the use of evidence is critical to the apologetic task. In an article on Johannine apologetics, he notes that the evidence supporting the claims of Christ in the gospel of John is offered to an unbelieving jury, and by its nature it requires a verdict.<sup>224</sup>

### The Relationship Between Faith and Reason

As a rationalistic apologist, Geisler claims that reason and revelation do not conflict, and that the truth claims of a revelation can be tested by rational criteria. Even though revelation may go beyond the limits of human reason, it does not go against the laws of identity, noncontradiction, and the excluded middle. For Geisler, belief in the Bible as a revelation from God can be established as a reasonable step, and faith in its propositional content is a rational consequence.

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<sup>224</sup>Norman L. Geisler, "Johannine Apologetics," Bibliotheca Sacra 136 (October-December 1979):544.

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