

## CHAPTER 4: OVERVIEW OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

*Anti-theism presupposes Theism.*

- Cornelius Van Til

*I hold that belief in God is not merely as reasonable as other belief, or even a little or infinitely more probably true than other belief; I hold rather that unless you believe in God you can logically believe in nothing else.*

- Cornelius Van Til

*Christianity is reasonable in virtue of the impossibility of the contrary.*

- Greg L. Bahnsen

*For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.*

- Romans 1:19

The previous chapters consisted mainly of classical apologetics. The classical method to Christian apologetics emphasizes evidence and reason. The tacit assumption is that the unregenerate (i.e., those not yet born again, spiritually dead) person will be open to a rational consideration of the logic and evidences that undergird Biblical Christianity. In other words, classical apologetics has a fairly optimistic view of human reason. The belief is that most people are internally motivated to be reasonable when it comes to exploring questions about God in general and about Christianity in particular. It assumes that people would like to know the truth and that they are generally prepared to turn from error and pursue truth if only it can be convincingly demonstrated to them.

The presuppositional approach begins with a very different assumption. Its view of the objectivity of the unregenerate mind is not optimistic. The presuppositionalist starts with the plain teachings of Scripture that the human heart “is more deceitful than anything else and desperately sick” (Jeremiah 17:9); that everyone who does wicked things hates the light [of truth] and does not come to the light, lest his works be exposed (John 3:20); and that our fallen human nature, apart from the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, “suppresses the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). This is why the obvious truth of God’s existence, which He has made plain to them and is “clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Romans 1:19-20) is resisted and even actively rejected by those who claim to be wise but show themselves to be utter fools (Romans 1:22).

This presents a quandary for the Christian apologist. Since God’s Word plainly reveals that the well of the human heart and mind were contaminated as a result of the fall, how do we appeal to the hearts and minds of the unregenerate in a convincing way so as to persuade them of the reality of God and their need for Christ? To many presuppositional apologists, the answer is, quite simply, “We can’t!” Of course, we don’t take this to mean that we shouldn’t defend the faith. It doesn’t suggest that we neglect to “always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in us” (1 Peter 3:15). Rather, it emphasizes the need for bold, unapologetic, unabashed proclamation of the Word of God, trusting the “faith comes by hearing the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).

The presuppositional apologist recognizes the need to discern the foolishness and self-defeating nature of any worldview, philosophy, or doctrine that opposes the message of the Bible. The presuppositional apologist endeavors to avoid “answer[ing] a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself” while discerning when and how to “answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes” (Proverbs 26:4-5). This involves more art than science.

In contrast to classical apologetics, there is not a large body of facts, evidences, dates, names, syllogisms, and so on to learn when taking the presuppositional approach. However, it requires more practice for most apologists to adeptly use this method. In my experience, it also requires more patience and better listening

skills, since the ultimate goal is to demonstrate how any system of knowledge or belief besides Biblical Christianity is either inadequate or self-defeating.

Consider the typical “street level” apologetics scenario. A follower of Jesus is testifying to the truth of the Biblical gospel, and Joe Atheist gives out a quiet, condescending chuckle. “What evidence do you have for that?” inquires Joe, confident that he has answered the claims of the Christian with a rhetorical question. Now, what typically ensues in the classical apologetics situation? The Christian will begin throwing out various lines of evidences and reasons why it makes sense to believe in the God of the Bible—anything from cosmological fine-tuning arguments to evidences for the empty tomb of Jesus (and everything in between). Our Christian friend here is hoping that at least one of his arguments will stick, that one of them will gain traction with his skeptical interlocutor.

Think about what happens as soon as the classically-trained Christian apologist begins offering reasons why Joe Atheist should consider Biblical Christianity. He has tacitly admitted that it is logically possible—it is at least reasonable—that the atheist is right. It might be that the evidence (or lack thereof) will show that to be more likely, but as of right now, the Christian is provisionally convinced that evidence and reason favors his conclusion. Note that the apostles and disciples *never* took this approach. They *always* took the gospel to the turf of unbelievers with the starting assumption that the Word of God is thoroughly and completely true and that Jesus Christ is exactly who he claimed to be! That was not the conclusion they hoped to reach after a long, rational consideration of the evidence; rather, it was their starting point.

Classical apologetics predominates Christian apologetics today. I can speculate why that is the case. I think it has to do with our (perhaps naïve) desire to trust that people are doing the best they can to arrive at truth given the information at their disposal. This is consistent with the spirit of classical liberalism which involved frequent, mutually-respectful (usually) public discourse and debate. Rival ideas were presented, cross-examined, and evaluated. The presumed goal was for the best idea to win the day and be adopted by reasonable and rational people. It’s easy to understand why, in that social context, evidence-based approaches that emphasized civility, restraint, and tolerance tended to predominate the apologetics landscape.

Of course, it doesn't require a Ph.D. in sociology or political science to realize that the spirit of classical liberalism is largely an artifact of the past. Just a couple decades ago, the golden standard for journalism was to reveal as little personal bias as possible in reporting. Pick a popular media outlet tonight and watch the news for five minutes and witness how the times have changed! Regardless of one's political allegiances, one thing is certain: We are now all undeniably aware of the enormous amount of bias that is behind virtually every story. Facts and evidences are "spun" and interpreted to fit narratives (on both the political left and right). Reporters, commentators, and pundits don't even pretend to be neutral anymore. Most are outspoken ideologues committed to a particular agenda and motivated to boost the popularity of their side while disparaging, discrediting, and—most importantly today—turning consumers against the other side.

All of that to say that I think presuppositional apologetics might be extraordinarily well-suited for 21<sup>st</sup> century Western society. It readily admits up front that every single human being brings powerful biases to the conversational table. There is no such thing as a person who is even remotely unbiased in his or her consideration of the evidence. And raw evidence alone is almost never enough to change anyone's mind. Because of the fallen nature of the human mind (in line with the doctrine of total depravity), the instrument of human cognition unaided can never be adequate, in and of itself, to apprehend a saving knowledge of God. It is impossible for the unregenerate human heart, operating within the confines of its own fallen nature, to decide to have saving faith in Jesus Christ. This is true even in a context where persuasive evidence abounds.

What, then, is the alternative? Simple. We are resolute, from the outset, to not play into the hands of the skeptic. While it's perfectly appropriate to lay out a basic, evidential case for the truth of the gospel up front, we should be careful to not get sucked into a black hole of chasing the never-ending litany of objections skeptics place in front of us. We must be quick to realize that more evidence is almost never what the skeptic needs. Because his heart is spiritually dead, loves sin, and hates the law of God, the more evidence we feed him, the more he will continue to chew up that evidence and spit it back in our face, usually mockingly.

Scripture reminds us at several points that God resists the proud. What chance do we have of winning a person over to our way of thinking when, due to their pride, Almighty God is actively resisting them? Apart from the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, more evidence, better evidence, and flawless syllogisms have never and will never lead anyone to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the emphasis must be placed squarely on the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing the Word, not by hearing the Kalam Cosmological Argument. “ ‘Not by might or by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty (Zechariah 4:6).

*Question to Consider:*

Which approach to apologetics—classical or presuppositional—do you think would be more effective in your efforts to witness to skeptics?

*God Has Revealed Himself to All People*

Presuppositional apologetics is prefaced on “revelational epistemology”. That’s quite a mouthful, so let’s break it down. By “revelation”, we refer to the ways God has made Himself known—how He has revealed Himself. “Epistemology” is a philosophical term that refers to how we know what we know, or how we can make and justify knowledge claims. Putting the two together, revelational epistemology holds that we can make valid knowledge claims based only on what God has revealed. Accordingly, God’s revelation is the proper starting point for all knowledge of Truth (or “true truth” as Francis Schaeffer called it).

Let’s start with Paul’s characterization of the powerful bent that fallen, sinful humans have towards suppressing God’s revealed truth. We’ll consider several verses so that we can track Paul’s complete thought.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became*

*futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Romans 1:18-23)*

What does Paul mean when he asserts that people are “without excuse”? They are without excuse for what? It’s clear from the context that Paul is saying that people are without excuse for not acknowledging, worshipping, honoring, and serving the One True Creator God.

Humans are without excuse because God has given all people adequate knowledge of Himself through the “general revelation” of creation (the cosmos) as well as their own conscience (awareness of right and wrong). Consequently, all humans are aware, on some level, that God exists (even though many will adamantly deny this). Despite God’s clear revelation, people choose to not honor God as God or give Him thanks. This is because we are all bound by the sinful nature which we inherited through Adam as a result of the Fall. We reject the True and Living God and foolishly attempt to replace Him with substitute “gods”. These substitutes can be animals or other created things (e.g., the Sun, Moon, stars, planets, et cetera). Many humans worship other humans. John Calvin couldn’t have been more right when he referred to the human heart as an idol factory!

Therefore, through general revelation, God has made His presence known to all people to such a degree that we can know that He is there and that we are beholden to Him and to His law that he has written on our hearts (Romans 2:15). In other words, through general revelation, all humans have enough of a revelation of God to condemn them, for we are all aware that God is real and that we have violated His law by violating our own consciences. To save those that He has appointed for eternal life (Acts 13:48)—and (indirectly) to increase the just damnation of those who reject Him—God also issued “special revelations” of Himself, through the Scriptures and, most specifically, through the incarnate Word of God, Jesus of Nazareth.

Accordingly, God’s revelation is met with one of two responses from every individual. A person will either continue to suppress, reject, and deny the obvious truth of God’s revelation throughout his or her entire life, or—by the grace of

God—that former truth-suppressor will repent, acknowledge the truthfulness of God’s revelation, and turn to God, through a living (obedient) faith in Jesus Christ. Due to the “noetic” effects of sin (that is, the effects of the Fall on the human mind), all humans are born with a sin nature that rejects God’s Truth and seeks to establish their own “truth”. When a person is “born again”, the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit overpowers the noetic effects of sin that causes that individual to keep living in defiance to the Truth of God. Because that person is a new creation, he or she is now free in Christ to obey, honor, worship, serve and love the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Notice here that a response to God’s revelation is mandatory. To employ a double-negative, a person *cannot not* respond to the revelation of God. No one can remain truly indifferent. Neutrality is not an option. All people are either actively suppressing the Truth of God’s revelation in their unrighteousness, or they are actively acknowledging the Truth. There is no such thing as a detached, objective, neutral observer. Many people claim to be exactly that, but God’s Word is clear that no such person exists! Jesus makes this point abundantly clear when he announces to the Pharisees, “Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God” (John 8:47).

Historically, the Dutch-American philosopher and reformed theologian Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) is credited with the development of the presuppositional approach to Christian apologetics. Van Til’s basic premise can be distilled to two very broad propositions: (1) Humans are obligated to presuppose God in all of their thinking; and (2) Unbelievers deny this obligation in every aspect of thought and life. Let’s take a deeper look at how this plays out in the life and mental set of the garden-variety 21<sup>st</sup> century atheistic Westerner.

Whereas the Christian affirms the Truth (“true truth”) of the first four words of the English Bible, “In the beginning, God...”, the atheistic materialist affirms, “In the beginning, *stuff*...” Logically, only one of these options can be true. They are mutually exclusive. If God is the eternal, transcendent Reality that gave rise to everything that was brought into existence (as Scripture testifies), and if “God is spirit” (John 4:24), then it is not true that some formulation or configuration of extended, physical matter (“stuff”) is the eternal reality that gave rise to everything else. The reverse is also true. Is there a reason to prefer one

explanation over the other? Yes! According to presuppositionalism, reason itself is that reason! Reason is the reason that “In the beginning, God...” *must* be true.

As it turns out, “naturalism” (i.e., atheistic materialism) is self-refuting. This can be demonstrated through the following *reductio ad absurdum*: If naturalism were true, we should never have developed the capacity for logic and reason required to conclude that it is true. Consider this: Stardust rearranged by billions of years of blind evolutionary forces could never have created a cognitive apparatus (e.g., brain/mind) that could make any claims to certain knowledge. But a claim to certain knowledge is required to maintain that reason can lead us to truth. That claim is assumed to be true whenever it is asserted that rationalism and empiricism are sufficient to justify truth claims.

The conclusion is inescapable: On atheistic naturalism, no one is ever justified in making any claim to know *anything* for certain. Atheistic naturalism, taken to its logical conclusion, invariably leads to epistemological nihilism, the denial of *all* knowledge claims. The philosophically consistent atheist must deny that he knows anything—including the claim that he is an atheist. He must admit that he could potentially be wrong about literally everything he believes!

By contrast, the theism (God-belief) at the heart of Biblical Christianity provides the perfect basis for making absolute truth claims. It does this by anchoring Truth (“true truth”) to the very nature of an eternal, unchanging, all-knowing, all-powerful God. Truth can therefore be defined as that which corresponds to reality as perceived by the mind of God. Because (and only because) God has chosen to reveal Truth to us, we can know Truth. This was the insight from Biblical theism that was behind the rise of the empirical (scientific) method. (By the way, this method stemmed largely from the work of an early 17<sup>th</sup> century English philosopher and Bible-believing Christian named Francis Bacon). A personal Creator God made and ordered the universe, including the minds of His human creatures, in such a way that truth claims can be investigated, examined, and either substantiated or refuted.

*Question to Consider:*

Do you think its possible for an atheistic materialist to justify her truth claims? Why or why not?

## *Knowledge Defined*

What is knowledge? What does it mean to claim to “know” something? Unless you were a philosophy major, you may never before have given deep consideration to questions like these. Although various definitions of knowledge have been offered, the only ones that actually succeed define it as beliefs that are both true and justified. Knowledge is justified, true belief. Accordingly, it’s not possible for anyone to “know” that Brazil is in Europe or that  $2 + 2 = 5$  or that water is 3 parts hydrogen and 1 part oxygen. The thing known must first be true. One can know *that* something is false but cannot know something false. Further, the thing known must be believed. You cannot know something you don’t believe.

So, all knowledge consists of true beliefs, but there is one more condition. Knowledge requires that those true beliefs are *justified*—that is, there are good reasons to accept its truth or, at minimum, that it is reasonable to hold that position. A person cannot reasonably claim to have knowledge that there’s a tiny rock shaped just like the continental United States among the trillions of rocks that make up Saturn’s rings. There is at present no way to justify such a belief. It might actually be a true claim, but it’s not something that one can present empirical evidence or sound reason to persuade others that it’s true. Putting all of this together, knowledge consists of one’s justified, true beliefs.

We’ve already stated that the central thesis of presuppositional apologetics is that humans can know nothing apart from God. As Van Til put it, human beings are obligated to presuppose God in all of their thinking. At first glance, this might seem like such a radical and categorical statement that it must represent an overstatement of the case. However, if we can demonstrate the impossibility of the contrary thesis (i.e., the “antithesis”), then we safely conclude that it is true that humans can know nothing apart from God.

Effectively, this argument works by demonstrating the impossibility of the contrary. Is there a way we can do this? Yes, we can demonstrate the impossibility of the contrary by showing that it is impossible for the atheistic naturalists/materialists to hold true beliefs that are *justified*. In other words, on atheistic naturalism, it is impossible to justify *any* type of belief, including beliefs that must be in place to attempt to argue against God or for naturalism.

It is fascinatingly ironic that so many skeptics today appeal to “science” as the end-all be-all of the justification of truth claims, including (ostensibly) truth claims that would undermine Biblical Christianity. Frequently, Bible-believing Christians are caricatured as being “anti-science”. Of course, this is absurd to the highest degree. Clear thinking Christians agree that the scientific method, used properly, is one of the most important tools for producing knowledge ever developed.

We saw earlier how the scientific method was developed within the context of a theistic system of belief in general and of Biblical Christianity in particular. In fact, it has been proposed—and I think reasonably so—that methodological science—could only have been developed within such a worldview context. After all, the assumptions that fixed laws of physics govern orderly interactions of matter and energy throughout the cosmos and that these laws were the same in the past as they are today and will be the same in future is required to do science.

The ideological architects and early pioneers of modern science like Galileo Galilei, Francis Bacon, René Descartes, Johannes Kepler, John Locke, and Isaac Newton (and many others) understood nature to be both orderly and understandable because it was the creation of a personal God who reveals Himself through the natural order. In fact, what became known as the scientific method was often referred to as the “Baconian method” in recognition of English philosopher and Bible-believing Christian Sir Francis Bacon.

On the other hand, the atheistic naturalist has no basis for his belief that the cosmos is orderly throughout, that local observations of order should have held in the remote past (including during the formation of the early universe) and will hold in the distant future. He may take this on faith, but he certainly makes assumptions that extend well beyond the scope of his local, empirically-based observations. Nor does the atheist have any *a priori* reason to think that the nature of nature remains constant across all space and time.

The atheist’s speculations regarding the theoretical conditions of events like the formation of the universe depend on a type of “blind faith” in the laws of physics. He must extrapolate, from a finite number of observable data points, laws that he simply assumes have been constant throughout the history of the space-time continuum. Nor is the atheist able to explain why the laws governing physical interactions, being absolute and fixed, should have taken on the parameters they

do rather than some other values along a virtually infinite scale of possibilities. All the atheist can really say at this point is, “It is what it is”. He can merely describe; he can’t explain.

In short, the atheistic naturalist is forced to make unwarranted assumptions in his account of the nature of nature. Specifically, he must assume, without any real basis for doing so, that the physical laws are fixed, orderly, and predictable. He holds this to be true not only of his present observations, but extrapolates this belief, without warrant, back to the horizon of the so-called “Big Bang” and forward to the prophesied heat death of the universe.

I’ve heard proponents of atheistic naturalism claim that what we call physical “laws” are only made up by people to describe/characterize the physical world. However, if this is true, on what basis do we claim that they are laws? How do we know that they have always been and will always be true? Such extrapolations are not warranted from the standpoint of so-called “scientific naturalism” (an increasingly popular euphemism for atheistic materialism).

By contrast, the Biblically-minded Christian need never take such a leap of blind faith. Instead of trusting in the unchanging nature of matter and energy, the Christian trusts in the eternal God revealed in Scripture to be unchanging. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). The Christian, but not the atheist, can affirm that the systematic study of nature through the scientific method leads to true knowledge—that is, to justified, true beliefs. This is possible only because the nature of nature was engineered by and is being upheld by a transcendent, unchanging, personal Creator God.

Consider the irony of that statement that is so often repeated in some form by skeptics: “I don’t believe in God; I believe in science”. However, the philosophically-consistent atheist cannot claim to have any scientific knowledge whatsoever. The empirical method cannot lead to justified, true belief in a system that is self-referential. The atheist is pre-committed to the view that the human mind is the end product of mutations and adaptations that took place over many millions of years and sculpted around the demands and constraints of survival and reproduction. That is, the brain/mind evolved, not to accurately apprehend truth in an unbiased and undistorted way, but to maximize gene duplication. If distorting reality in certain ways furthered the goal of gene copying (as the

evolutionary biologists and psychologists maintain was the case, especially in their speculations regarding human evolution), then that is what *must necessarily* have happened, according to their theory.

Atheistic materialism leaves us with a brain/mind that might be extraordinarily well-adapted to promote survival and (especially) reproduction, but could never be trusted when it comes to matters of objectivity, logic, reason and truth. In other words, if naturalism/materialism is true, then knowledge is not possible. Atheists can literally “know” nothing! While the atheist must presuppose the laws of logic in order to reason about anything (including his disbelief in God), he is completely unable to account for these laws on the basis of his materialistic understanding of reality. His metaphysical position is attempting to write an epistemological check that cannot be cashed. Thus, he might repeat the vapid and logically fallacious statement, “I don’t believe in God; I believe in science” intending it to be a mic-drop conversation stopper, but it’s the Biblically-minded Christian who can (and should) respond with full confidence, “I can believe in science, *because* I believe in God!”

As it turns out, atheistic materialists (aka “scientific naturalists”) must borrow the presuppositions of the Biblical Christian in order to argue *against* God. To myself “borrow” a phrase from Christian apologist Frank Turek, atheists must “steal from God” in order to argue that God doesn’t exist! Their own positions on the nature of reality and the evolution of the human mind, followed logically, cannot lead to a justification for the raw materials of rational inquiry. The atheistic materialists can provide no rational basis for the reliability of the senses and human perception, no justification for the laws of logic, and no assurance that what appears to be the lawful behavior of matter and energy in our tiny little corner of an incomprehensibly vast cosmos is what always has and always will hold true always and everywhere.

### *Presuppositionalism on the Streets*

How might we adapt the presuppositional approach to apologetics to our “street-level” conversations? In teaching apologetics, I like to repeatedly tell Christians to “make them make their case”. That is, we should not accept the assumptions of the Bible critic out of hand. We are not the only ones with a worldview that needs to be reasoned, articulated, and defended. Skeptics often make it seem like it’s

only the Christian worldview that needs to stand up to the most critical tests of evidence, logic, and reason, but why should that be the case? They are required to make their case, too.

In fact, everyone who steps into the arena of public discourse with assertions of that is true and what isn't should be prepared to give a reasonable account of how they arrived at their conclusions. It isn't just Christianity that is on trial. If our interlocutor is an atheist, then you are also free (and encouraged) to put her atheism on trial. Metaphysical naturalism/materialism doesn't automatically win the day by default. It needs to be scrutinized rigorously to determine whether it is coherent, consistent, and leads to logical, rational conclusions.

For the present discussion, this is especially true in terms of epistemology (how we know what we know; how we justify our claims to knowledge). As Christians, we affirm that all Truth is God's Truth and that Truth is that which corresponds to reality as perceived by the mind of God. Thus, we can know what we know because God knows all, and He has chosen to reveal certain types of knowledge to us. God has revealed knowledge of the created order, as registered through the apparatus of our brain/mind and senses. He has also revealed special knowledge of Himself through the Scriptures and through the person of Jesus Christ. As Bible-believing Christians, we have an absolute, eternal, transcendent standard to appeal to in order to justify knowledge claims. We can really know, because God really knows and has chosen to reveal knowledge to us.

While the atheist is unlikely to accept our epistemological anchoring (as that would clash with their precommitment to reject God and His Word) and may even disparage it, the onus is nevertheless on her to give a reasonable explanation for how she can truly know what she claims to know. Before closing this chapter, I will quickly describe four specific areas where the Christian should press the atheistic materialist to provide a cogent case to substantiate her knowledge claims.

First, if the atheist makes any moral claims that she considers to be universally true and socially binding (i.e., racism is wrong; rape is evil; child sex trafficking is reprehensible; et cetera), then she needs to identify which objective, unchanging standard undergirds those claims. It is not enough to claim that "all morally sane people know those things are wrong" as that involves "begging the question" (a

logical fallacy begins by assuming his conclusion). Neither can the atheist appeal to her powerful visceral emotional responses to things like racism, rape, and child trafficking in order to establish the claim that one can have knowledge that these things are wrong. That some people (like psychopaths) take no issue with these things today testifies to the inadequacy of basing morality simply upon emotional reactions. This point is reinforced by the fact that large segments of entire societies (like Nazi Germany, large segments of the early USA, et cetera) have supported things like racism to the point of genocide and chattel slavery, respectively. We see here that the Moral Argument for God, described in Chapter One, is actually a subarea of presuppositional apologetics.

Second, the atheistic materialist needs to give a reasoned account for the trustworthiness of her sensations and perceptions. After all, she is not merely relying upon her senses and perceptions to tell her that she is about to walk over a cliff or that a predator is likely behind that bush over there so she needs to find a different walking route. The types of processing that is required to engage in advanced mathematical reasoning, philosophical analysis, ethical disquisition, reflections on cosmological history and theorizing about the future (and so forth) involves the highest levels of abstraction. If we are vulnerable to routine interferences and distortions (like optical illusions, for example) at the first and most elementary level of processing, on what basis does the atheistic naturalist maintain the integrity and accuracy of cognitions that are produced at much “higher” levels of mental deliberation? How can she be confident that the system isn’t even more riddled with proclivities toward error, miscomputation, misattribution and misconstrual at the level of the abstract, theoretical, and conceptual?

Third, the atheistic materialist is required to give a justification for her appeals to the laws of logic. As mentioned above, the laws of logic are prerequisite for any rational, coherent, and meaningful discourse on just about anything but especially on topics like the nature of truth, reality, morality, and the existence (or non-existence) of God. The Christian has a source for the laws of logic, as God’s very nature is logical, coherent, and rational. The atheistic naturalist, however, must accept that atomic nuclei banging for billions of years, mostly in the form of the dust from exploded stars, can somehow end up constructing a machine (the human brain) that is capable of pure logical analysis. That requires enormous faith

in machine-building “from the ground up”, without any intelligent designer or engineer. We see again how the proper conversation is not faith-versus-science but faith-in-God-versus-faith-in-stardust. Which is more rational?

Finally, the atheistic materialist must honestly confront the question of her own biases and objectivity. Of all of the tasks set before her, this may indeed prove to be the most difficult. Is our atheist friend able to take a big step back and away from the heat of the debate and, with humility and a teachable attitude, evaluate the relative merits of her case over against the case made by the Biblical Christian? In all fairness, this should work both ways much more often than it does. Perhaps one of the greatest noetic “glitches” in the way we think is tribalism, and Christians are by no means immune to the sort of errors that can produce, even with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (although His presence within us should help).

When I was a professing atheist, I distinctly recall having an epiphany that I hadn’t arrived at atheism as the end result of an unbiased quest for truth. Although, like many atheists, I claimed to be a “freethinker” and arrogated science, logic, and reason into my corner of the debate, I came to understand that I was “cultured” into atheism more than compelled there by the evidence. On my journey back to the Cross, I came to realize just how truthfully Scripture testifies that “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5; James 4:6).

*Questions to Consider:*

What are some practical ways we can help the atheist see that she is “on the line” for her atheism and needs to give a rational account for it?

Write out a few questions that might be helpful here.