PRIDEFUL PREJUDICE: THE EFFECTS OF WORLDVIEW, WARRANTS, AND AUTHORITY IN APOLOGETICS

BY

JOSEPH S. KASPER

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

PROF. PAUL O. WENDLAND, ADVISOR

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

MEQUON,WI

FEBRUARY 18, 2022

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Christians and atheists both write apologetic books. Obviously, those books differ as the Christian attempts to win a hearing of the gospel, while the atheist attempts to prove that the existence of God is ridiculous. As I read these books, it was clear that the arguments were not formulated in the same manner. In this paper, I explore the possibility that the reason these arguments are different is due to differences in worldview leading to fundamentally different approaches. These differing worldviews lead to separate views of authority and affect the arguments Christians and atheists make.

PART 1: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Introduction

Apologetics for and against the existence of God has become a major phenomenon in recent years. Books and movies on the subject have hit the mainstream. People are interested in telling their personal conversion stories and explaining what made God real for them. It seems great that more people are interested in hearing about Christianity from these people who are writing and producing movies.

However, for every *The Case for Christ*, there is *The God Delusion*. For every *Mere Christianity* there is a *Breaking the Spell*. Apologetics is not just a Christian game anymore. Atheists too have stepped into the ring of apologetic debate and they are unafraid. They pull no punches and they argue just as well as any Christian out there.

But as I read authors on both sides of this apologetic war, I realized that there is a noticeable difference in writing. However, it is not just the writing that strikes the reader as different. The arguments of an atheist do not connect with the Christian and vice versa. There seems to be a fundamental difference in what is going on in the minds of apologists.

My goal in writing this thesis is to explore the differences in atheist and Christian apologetics and then talk about why those differences exist. I believe that a person's worldview changes their implicit arguments drastically. Not only is this the case, but if people are not aware of their own worldview and the arguments that their worldview creates, they will inevitably talk

past others. Therefore, to have more effective conversations, Lutherans should be aware of differing worldviews and how arguments will change based on these worldviews.

I will begin by looking at the art of argumentation. If we really want to understand the differences in Christian and atheist arguments, we must first understand how persuasive arguments are made in general. Once that is done, I will show the importance of worldview. This term is hard to define and can cover a lot of different things. However, once worldview is defined for this study, it will help one understand where both atheist and Christian authors are coming from in their writing.

Equipped with these understandings of worldview and effective argumentation, I will finally dive into the real meat of this paper. I will look at specific atheist apologetic books and specific Christian apologetic books and talk about their main arguments. This will involve not only pointing out where they make good and bad arguments, but also showing how one's particular argument is inevitably tied to his worldview. At the same time, I will focus on the Bible's arguments and worldview and how this has shaped the Lutheran way of thinking about apologetics.

Literature Review

This paper covers three major topics: argumentation, worldview, and an analysis of Christian and atheist apologetic models. Argumentation and worldview must be understood and must work together before proper analyses can begin.

There are several different fields one could study to look at argumentation. Edward Corbett focused on classical forms of rhetoric, while Stephen Toulmin expanded upon the

enthymeme to create his own model for argumentation. Corbett's book *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* is a guide for explaining the history of rhetoric and how it is still used in argumentation today. Toulmin's work, *The Uses of Argument*, helps one not only distill how arguments are crafted, but also how to understand more in-depth arguments in a syllogistic manner. This model is similar to Antoine Braet's writings on "status." Braet focused on arguments answering questions the same way that lawyers would work to answer questions in a courtroom in his article "The Classical Doctrine of 'Status' and the Rhetorical Theory of Argumentation."

Toulmin's model helps one better understand the worldviews of the arguers. However, defining worldview is a tricky business. Paul Wendland defines worldview differently than Helena Helve and Michael Pye, but they all use their definitions to talk about opportunities for evangelism. Wendland focused on reaching out to younger generations in his paper "Preaching Today," delivered at the Bethany Reformation Lectures. Helve and Pye focused on a more general and deeper definition of worldview in their article "Theoretical correlation's (*sic*) between world-view (*sic*), civil religion, institutional religion and informal spiritualities." Milton Horne coupled worldview with Toulmin's model in order to show that worldview actually makes quite a difference when it comes to how someone crafts their arguments. He especially found this useful in teaching religion courses at William Jewel College, as he explained in the article "Teaching Religious Doubt with Toulmin's Model of Reasoning."

With a workable model, it is possible to begin looking at the different arguments that are used by atheists. Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris are all well-known atheist apologists. Dawkins and Dennett in *The God Delusion* and *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* respectively, argue that religion is something that should be looked at

through the same lens as one views scientific evidence. Both Dennett and Dawkins also agree with Harris's take in *Letter to a Christian Nation*, that all religions have caused terrible evils in the world and should therefore be abolished. While there are multiple arguments in their books, for the purpose of this paper, we will turn our attention to their main arguments concerning why religions should no longer exist.

On the Christian side of apologetics, W. Mark Lanier and Lee Strobel both worked to prove why they believe what they believe. Lanier, a trial lawyer, brought his expertise at explaining evidence into the discussion of Scripture's reliability in his book, *Christianity on Trial: A Lawyer Examines the Christian Faith*. Lee Strobel, a former atheist and former legal editor of *The Chicago Tribune*, did his own study on the claims Scripture makes about Jesus in *The Case for Christ: Solving the Biggest Mystery of All Time*. C. S. Lewis used a different tactic by simply trying to explain what Christians believe about humanity and the world in his classic, *Mere Christianity*.

Finally, there is the Biblical and Lutheran position, which tends to be a bit different from how other Christian authors tackle apologetics. Where other Christians attempt to convert their readers through logical argumentation, Siegbert Becker, Adolf Hoenecke, Francis Pieper, and Luke Thompson all point out that Scripture alone can change a person's heart. Becker focuses on Luther's view of Scripture and reason in *The Foolishness of God: The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther.* Hoenecke and Pieper in their dogmatics texts both define apologetics differently than many people understand it today. Finally, Thompson in his thesis, *An Apologetic of the Cross as a Lutheran Approach to 21st Century Apologetics Centered on the Hiddenness of God* explains that Lutherans have a different goal in apologetics. He then goes on to explain how that goal is fulfilled. This different view of apologetics does not mean that Lutherans and the

Bible do not also have their own arguments and worldview. Instead, it means that they argue distinctly compared to what is seen in the works of others.

PART 2: ARGUMENTATION AND WORLDVIEW

Argumentation

Before any comparison of arguments can happen, one must understand how arguments are formed. Many are aware of the syllogistic form of argumentation. Syllogisms have often been shown with a three-sentence example, such as: All men are mortal beings. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is a mortal being. Corbett explains, "The syllogism is made up of three categorical propositions, the first two being called *premises*, the last one being the *conclusion* drawn from these premises. The categorical syllogism is built on three terms: a major term, a minor term, and a middle term."[1] Corbett goes on to explain that the major term is the predicate in the conclusion, the minor term is the subject of the conclusion, and the middle term is whatever linked both of the premises but does not appear in the conclusion.[2] In the example above, "mortal being" is the major term, "Socrates" is the minor term," and "men" is the middle term.

Stephen Toulmin explains this differently. Toulmin would see the first sentence of the above syllogism as a "warrant," a type of bridge between a piece of data and a conclusion.[3] In a simple syllogism, this might not seem all that important, but when one gets into more complex

1. Edward P. J. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 61.

2. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 61.

3. Stephen E. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 91.

forms of argument, warrants become essential. “Data are appealed to explicitly, warrants implicitly,” as Toulmin says.[4] In other words, warrants are not always obvious. Most of the time, warrants are something that the reader figures out on their own.

It may take some time to understand someone’s warrant when looking at an argument, but Toulmin explains, “arguments must not just have a particular shape, but must be set out and presented in a sequence of steps conforming to certain basic rules of procedure.”[5] His point is that there is a judicial way of thinking about arguments. This is the same idea that Antoine Braet brought out when speaking about *status* in judicial arguments: “The *status* constitute a series of points which have to be established to the judge’s satisfaction, which therefore ‘have to be proved,’ before he feels obliged to impose a sanction. This makes it clear that the doctrine of *status* is a doctrine of the burden of proof.”[6] According to Braet, rhetorical arguments should be considered in a courtroom setting where there are “three roles, those of proponent, opponent, and adjudicator.”[7] So, when someone creates an argument, they must be aware of the three roles. The one arguing is the proponent, looking to prove their point. Others serve as the opponents, who are looking to disprove what the proponent says. Finally, there are still others who are judging what is being said. These are the adjudicators. When applying this to apologetics, the reader should serve as the adjudicator, rather than the proponent or the opponent.

Tying Braet and Toulmin together is important. When considering someone’s writing, the author would take the role of the proponent and the reader would take the role of the judge.

---

4. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument*, 92.

5. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument*, 40.

6. Antoine Braet, “The Classical Doctrine of *Status* and the Rhetorical Theory of Argumentation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1987): 87.

7. Braet, “Classical Doctrine,” 90.

Braet's point is that the proponent and opponent will cause one to think about the major question at hand. For example, Braet cites the trial of Orestes in Cicero's *De inventione.* The proponent and opponent in that scenario push the judge to answer the question, "Was this murder justified?"[8] Any arguments that the proponent or opponent use will fall into the argumentation style that Toulmin proposes. There will be a piece of data and a conclusion from that piece of data. However, there is also an unspoken major premise, or implicit argument, that the proponent or opponent is using at the same time.

Toulmin illustrates this with the example of Petersen the Swede. "Petersen is a Swede so he is almost certainly not Roman Catholic."[9] Once this argument is made, the proponent would likely go on to explain why he believes it is so. He might say, "The proportion of Roman Catholic Swedes is less than 2%."[10] This is an example of the evidence that backs a warrant. This extra data is not the warrant itself. The warrant, or implicit argument, about Petersen is "a Swede can be taken to be almost certainly not a Roman Catholic."[11] In a courtroom setting, like Braet proposes, there will be data, backing evidence, and conclusions in an obvious manner. However, the warrants or answer to the *krinomenon* (unspoken question that proponents and opponents are attempting to answer)[12] will most likely be implicit.

---

8. Braet, "Classical Doctrine," 81. In this scenario, the proponent claims the opponent killed their mother and the opponent claims that this was a lawful killing.

9. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument*, 103. It is not necessary to get into the idea of a "qualifier" in this paper. In short, Toulmin argues that one cannot make a true argument without having a qualifying statement, because Petersen could in fact be a Roman Catholic. That is why the "almost certainly" is in the argument above.

10. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument*, 103.

11. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument*, 103.

12 . Braet, "Classical Doctrine," 81. "During the preparation of their speeches both parties imagine that they are in the courtroom. Following the schema, they anticipate their opponent's arguments and decide on their reaction to them. In this way they ultimately deduce the *krinomenon*, i.e., the crucial question that the judge must answer."

This whole form of argumentation is called: enthymeme. "In modern times, the enthymeme has come to be regarded as an abbreviated syllogism—that is, an argumentative statement that contains a conclusion and one of the premises, the other premise being implied."[13] So the enthymeme contains a datum and the conclusion. The warrant is unspoken. The speaker has deduced the *krinomenon* and has concluded how the *krinomenon* should be answered. The enthymeme "John will fail his examination because he hasn't studied,"[14] is an example of all of this. The datum is that John has not studied and the conclusion is that he will fail. The *krinomenon* is: Will John pass his exam or fail it? The warrant is: People who do not study fail exams.

There is one final point worth considering concerning arguments for this study. Specifically in this study, the ethical appeal is useful.[15]

> The ethical appeal is exerted, according to Aristotle, when the speech itself impresses the audience that the speaker is a man of sound sense (*phronesis*), high moral character (*arete*), and benevolence (*eunoia*). Notice that it is *the speech itself* which must create this impression. Thus a man wholly unknown to his audience (and this is often the case when we listen to a speech or read an article in a magazine) could by his words alone inspire this kind of confidence. Some men, of course, already have a reputation familiar to an audience, and this reputation, if it is a good one, will favorably dispose an audience toward a man, even before he utters a word. In the last analysis however, it is the discourse itself which must establish or maintain the ethical appeal, for what a man says in any particular discourse could weaken or destroy his previously established reputation.[16]

---

13. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 73.

14. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 74.

15. Appeals to reason and emotion are also important and I will bring up some points concerning both as this study continues. However, when it comes to the main points a reader needs to keep in mind, they are not as necessary, especially because they are easier to understand and can be handled without preliminary study.

16. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 93 – 4.

It is important to note the fact that the speech itself is doing the work. The speech creates the impression, rather than the person speaking. Especially when it comes to warrants and the authority[17] to which an author appeals, the way an author carries him or herself can help or harm the argument being made. "The effect of the ethical appeal might very well be destroyed by a single lapse from good sense, good will, or moral integrity."[18] In other words, one poorly phrased sentence could ruin the entire argument. An angry outburst in the courtroom could make the judge agree more with the opponent than the proponent. A warrant based on bad will or poor sense may do more harm than good towards an argument.

Worldview

The idea of worldview also needs to be discussed to properly talk about arguments. "The term is most often used to refer to a systemized totality of beliefs around the world."[19] In other words, many people consider it to be whatever underlying assumptions someone has that shapes what one believes. This system does not have to be linked to just religious factors. Since people live in different areas and different time periods, different worldviews appear. Helve and Pye write, "Accordingly, quite diverse cases of ideology, religion, philosophy or political movements or doctrine have been referred to as world-views, including such prominent examples as Marxism,

17. When I write "authority," I am referring to a person's "informed opinion." Cf. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 138. He not only explains authority, but also has a list of questions to consider when looking at conflicting views.

18. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 95.

19. Helena Helve and Michael Pye, "Theoretical correlation's between world-view, civil religion, institutional religion and informal spiritualities," *Temenos* 37-38 (2001-2002), 88.

Liberalism, Catholicism, or Islam."[20] Clearly, there are a lot of different factors involved in defining worldview.

Paul Wendland talks about the diversity of worldviews that can be seen as a preacher:

> The congregation of farmers and blue-collar workers in the eighties I preached to were quite different in many ways to the middle managers and professionals I preached to in the nineties. They were different, in turn, from the Gen X-ers, Gen Y-ers, and Gen Z-ers I have been instructing since 1994! And this is despite the fact that these folks, whatever their age and wherever they lived, all mostly came from good WELS/ELS stock.[21]

As Wendland states, his audiences have changed throughout his ministry. Even though they shared a common religious background, they were not all the same. They changed with their generations and due to their professions.

It should also be noted that worldviews are not static. They continue to change throughout a person's life.

> World-views (*sic*) are not just there, but are constantly being formed in the minds of individuals. How are world-views formed? Since the world-view has many layers, this is quite a complicated process. At the individual level, the formation of a world view can be seen on the one hand as a process of socialization. These processes offer explanations of, for example, the linkage of parental religious patterns to adolescent and adult religiosity…. Children's and young people's world-views are formed in communities and their ways of interpreting the world are shaped by the shared images of their parents, or other people similar to them in the home and outside, in the church, school, mass media, and other social institutions, i.e. through a process of socialization.[22]

There is fluidity in a person's worldview. People learn as they grow older and they also learn from what they see around them. All of this goes into shaping someone's worldview. There is also the factor of people being naturally different. "And not every clan in the tribes we encounter will have exactly the same beliefs. There are always plenty of variations, besides cautionary tales

---

20. Helve, "Theoretical correlation's," 88 – 9.

21. Paul Wendland, "Preaching Today" (paper, 52nd Annual Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures, Mankato: 2019), 4.

22. Helve, "Theoretical correlation's," 90.

aplenty to warn us against stereotyping."[23] Even if someone scratches the surface regarding worldview, there is always more to consider.

As demonstrated above, there are many factors involved with defining "worldview." For the sake of this study, Helve and Pye have an apt explanation. "Through the world-view we get explanations and answers to questions such as why the world is the way it is and where we come from?"[24] Although there are other factors that could be considered, these are the most important questions to consider presently. Obviously, an atheist and a Christian will answer these questions differently. How atheists and Christians answer these questions will directly affect the warrants that they use for their arguments.

Milton Horne explains how worldviews affect warrants by showing how he uses Toulmin's model to teach students how they should test theological claims:

> Warrants usually consist of some rule or law or principle that derives from tradition or an institution. For example, when Christians claim that Jesus is the messiah (*sic*), their grounding is also sought in his resurrection from death. This claim may be warranted by the conviction of God's ability to perform such miraculous feats, and also by shared interpretations of scriptures that seem to foreshadow the event: "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him: (Hosea 6:2). It never occurs to my Christian students that a hypothetical Jewish student might not grant that a resurrection, even if such a thing happened, had anything to do with messianism per se, especially since said resurrection did not usher in any recognizable messianic age or messianic feast. In a word, for our Jewish student, there is no warrant for an assertion that resurrection might serve as grounding for a messianic claim.[25]

According to Horne, worldview molds warrants. A Christian holds that Jesus is the Messiah because of the worldview they have regarding the resurrection. A Jew does not hold the same view because they hold different worldviews concerning what is involved with a messianic

---

23. Wendland, "Preaching Today," 4.
24. Helve, "Theoretical correlation's," 91.

25. Milton P. Horne, "Teaching Religious Doubt with Toulmin's Model of Reasoning," *Teaching Theology and Religion* vol. 11 no. 4 (2008), 205.

kingdom. Clearly, worldview plays an important role in understanding the warrants someone uses in their arguments.[26] Worldview helps form warrants and warrants in turn build arguments.

Worldview also helps explain ethical arguments that people use and the authority behind those arguments. Because of their differing worldviews, Christians and atheists view different pieces of data as authoritative as they make their arguments. For example, a Christian's ethical argument, based on Scripture's authority will look to God's almighty power to explain creation. On the other hand, a scientist that holds to the worldview that things must be proven through mathematics or experimental sciences will explain creation based on the authority of the authority of the data they or others have collected.

26. It is interesting to note that Horne himself reveals his worldviews concerning Scripture. Cf. Horne, "Teaching Religious Doubt," 208: "From the instructor's point of view, the Bible, because of its literary compositeness, multi-vocality, and theological pluralism, cannot be taken as a unity. The Bible is not aware of itself as a canon of literature. Hence, any evidence that is encountered in one book or one passage cannot be said to apply for all of the books or passages." Horne's warrant would be that Scripture is not a unity and his worldview would reflect that. Perhaps his worldview would involve an understanding that God only preached to people at one time and in one place, not for people of all time. Whereas, my warrant as a WELS member is that Scripture is a unity, based on passages like 2 Tim 3:16–17 and 2 Pet 1:21. This is also influenced by my worldview that all of Scripture is Christocentric and telling one cohesive truth.

PART 3: ATHEIST APOLOGISTS

This section and the ones following it focus on the arguments that are used in several different atheist and Christian apologetic books. The goal is to point out the main warrant(s) of the authors, what that tells the reader about their worldviews, and to identify their ethical arguments.[27]

The atheists studied in this paper all have a similar purpose in writing. They are all writing against religion and advocating for understanding the world based on what they can observe, whether that be mathematically, scientifically, or experientially.

Richard Dawkins

Richard Dawkins is a Professor at Oxford and noted atheist apologist who wrote the book *The God Delusion*, which is designed to show that atheism is a "realistic aspiration."[28] Although this is his stated goal in the preface, a different goal becomes clear as one reads the book: Dawkins wants to show that God does not exist. "This book will advocate an alternate view: *any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution*."[29] In other words, any creator must have

27. Obviously, there are many books that I was not able to use for this thesis. There are also more argumentative forms in these books that I have not been able to note. However, my hope is that this will give a clear example of how one can read an argument and understand it while also appreciating where the author is coming from in making those arguments.

28. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin: 2006), 1.

29. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 31.

gradually evolved to be a creator. Dawkins would argue that even if God did exist, he is the result of an evolutionary process.

To prove his thesis, Dawkins treats the existence of God as a scientific hypothesis.[30] One of the studies he cited against this hypothesis was a prayer study. The study was designed to find out whether or not prayer would improve a sick person's health. Dawkins notes that although theologians did not like this study, it would fall into the realm of science. "The Templeton Foundation correctly recognized when it financed the study, the alleged power of intercessory prayer is at least in principle within the reach of science."[31] The study showed that there "was no difference between those patients who were prayed for and those who were not."[32] In Dawkins's eyes, this serves as scientific proof that there is no God, because God would have answered prayers. This shows Dawkins's most obvious warrant in his arguments: Things need to be proven through mathematics or experimental science.

Another example of Dawkins's interest in data can be found as he looks at the ontological argument. The ontological argument rests on the belief that since humans can conceive of a perfect being, that being must exist. Dawkins rejects this idea of *a priori* evidence for God on principle. He has "deep suspicion of any line of reasoning that reached such a significant conclusion without feeding in a single piece of data from the real world."[33]

With these two examples, it is possible to talk about the main warrant that Dawkins is working with throughout *The God Delusion.* He wants some sort of scientific or mathematical

30. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 50.

31. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 65.

32. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 63.

33. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 82.

data, something provable and logical in his own mind before he will believe something to be true.

Since one cannot give a scientific answer to the question, "Who designed the intelligent designer?" Dawkins relies on what seems most logical to him. "Chance and design both fail as solutions to the problem of statistical improbability, because one of them is the problem, and the other one regresses to it. Natural selection is a real solution. It is the only workable solution that has ever been suggested."[34] Intelligent design is not a workable answer for Dawkins because it does not answer the question of what started everything. An intelligent designer, in Dawkins's mind, must have come from somewhere. However, chance and natural selection do fit Dawkins's warrant. By its nature, natural selection is based upon probability, even if it is a low probability. This is something that Dawkins is comfortable with, because it makes logical sense to him.

Dawkins's warrant also gives insight into his worldview. Dawkins clearly sees the world as a logical place that can be explained by math and science—specifically statistical analyses and empirical data that can be proven or disproven. Because of this, Dawkins's view means that empirical data and human logic hold ultimate authority. Going back to the worldview questions mentioned above (Why is the world the way it is and where do we come from?), Dawkins would answer that the world is the way it is through the process of natural selection, and this is where humans come from.

Finally, it is important to look at the ethical arguments that Dawkins employs. As noted above, one of the important factors in making ethical arguments is the one arguing needs to show that they are a person of sound sense and moral integrity. Dawkins does well with these as he points to mathematics and science, but when he gets into Scripture, he falls short.

---

34. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 121.

> To be fair, much of the Bible is not systematically evil but just plain weird, as you would expect of a chaotically cobbled-together anthology of disjointed documents, composed, revised, translated, distorted, and 'improved' by hundreds of anonymous authors, editors and copyists, unknown to us and mostly unknown to each other, spanning nine centuries. … Those who wish to base their morality literally on the Bible have either not read it or not understood it.[35]

Dawkins does not have a high view of Scripture. This should not be surprising considering his worldview about the authority of statistics and empirical data. However, the last phrase is problematic for his ethics. He believes that those who believe the Bible must not have read it or understood it.

The issue is that Dawkins has clearly not understood Scripture either. He claims that "God's monumental rage whenever his chosen people flirted with a rival god resembles nothing so much as sexual jealousy of the worst kind."[36] Indeed, God does talk about the Israelites prostituting themselves to other gods in Ezek 16:

> But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places, where you carried on your prostitution. You went to him, and he possessed your beauty. You also took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them. (15–17 NIV)

Dawkins is correct that this is similar to sexual jealousy. However, Scripture is describing the feelings of an infinite God. Like a husband who saves his wife from the elements expects love, God too expects love from the people he had saved. However, his own people left him to prostitute themselves to lifeless beings. It then makes sense that God would act in jealousy and take his commands seriously. God declares about himself: "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those

35. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 237.

36. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 243.

who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exod 20:5b–6). In other words, God expected his people to follow him and him alone. If they did not, he had warned that he would discipline them. Dawkins's belief that this is a problem betrays a misunderstanding of God's covenant with his people and a misunderstanding of the fact that God is described as infinitely bigger than his creation.

Dawkins also has a poor ethical argument when looking at Jesus's defense of the apostles picking grain on the Sabbath:

> Jesus was not content to derive his ethics from the scriptures of his upbringing. He explicitly departed from them, for example when he deflated the dire warnings about breaking the sabbath. 'The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath' has been generalized into a wise proverb. Since a principal thesis of this chapter is that we do not, and should not derive our morals from scripture, Jesus has to be honoured as a model for that very thesis.[37]

There is a glaring issue with this argument. Jesus did not depart from Scripture in his refuting of the Pharisees. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record Jesus quoting the Old Testament to the Pharisees. Jesus referred to 1 Sam 21:4-6:

> But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women."
>
> David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's bodies are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

The fact that Dawkins ignores Jesus pointing to this account shows, at best, that he is not using sound sense and at worst, that he is ignoring it on purpose (which harms his moral integrity). Dawkins cannot say that Jesus was not deriving his ethics from Scripture when he quotes Scripture to justify his disciples' actions. This also shows that the Bible is not a chaotic

37. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 250.

hodgepodge of different documents, because at the very least, the authors of the Gospels saw fit to place the words of the Old Testament in Jesus's mouth.[38] However, none of this should be surprising, because Dawkins's worldview does not consider Scripture to be an authority.

Daniel Dennett

Daniel Dennett is a professor of philosophy and co-director of the Center for Cognitive Studies at Tufts University. In his book, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, he takes a stance that is similar to Dawkins. He believes that religion should be studied, but rather than taking a fully scientific approach, he takes more of a philosophical approach.

> The religious, in contrast [to atheists], often bristle at the impertinence, the lack of respect, the *sacrilege*, implied by anybody who wants to investigate their views. I respectfully demur: there is indeed an ancient tradition to which they are appealing here, but it is mistaken and should not be permitted to continue. *This* spell must be broken, and broken now. Those who are religious and believe religion to be the best hope of humankind cannot reasonably expect those of us who are skeptical to refrain from expressing our doubts if they themselves are unwilling to put their convictions under the microscope…. We want what they (mostly) want: a world at peace, with as little suffering as we can manage, with freedom and justice and well-being and meaning for all…. They claim the moral high ground; maybe they deserve it and maybe they don't.[39]

Dennett's whole argument is based on the morality of what people believe. He wants to study religion, just like Dawkins, but he also wants to determine whether religion is something good for people and the societies in which they live.

One of the proofs he uses for religion not being morally good comes from the general disbelief in evolution that is found in most religions (specifically Christianity).[40] "But how, in the

---

38. My point here is not to say that the Gospel writers were putting words into Jesus's mouth, but rather to say that even from his own point of view, Scripture shows a unity.

39. Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, (New York: Penguin, 2006), 17.

40. Most of Dennett's arguments are against Christianity specifically, because it is the religion with which he is most acquainted. Cf Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, xiii–xiv: "My focus on America is deliberate; when it comes

face of so much striking confirmation and massive scientific evidence, could so many Americans disbelieve in evolution? It is simple: they have been solemnly *told* that the theory of evolution is false (or at least unproven) by people they trust more than they trust scientists."[41] His point here is that ministers have misled the masses by not providing them with evidence for what they say. He goes on to explain why "the Bible says" is not a convincing argument to him:

> You may believe that you don't need to consider the scientific evidence at all, since "the Bible says" that evolution is false, and that's all there is to it. This is a more extreme position than sometimes recognized…. The Bible is not a plausible candidate as common ground to be shared *without further discussion* in a reasonable conversation. If you insist it is, you are thumbing your nose at the whole inquiry.[42]

Dennett wants people to be willing to have further discussions. To simply point to a religious text is not going to prove anything and it does not stand as common ground for people. Because of this, Dennett would claim that one needs to be willing to dig deeper into what they believe and why they believe it.

Beyond this, Dennett focuses on why people find religion important. "Religion plays its most important role in supporting morality, many think, by giving people an unbeatable reason to do good: the promise of an infinite reward in heaven, and (depending on tastes) the threat of an infinite punishment in hell if they don't."[43] Simply put, religion gives people the incentive to do good to one another. However, Dennett believes it is impossible to follow the morality of any religious text. He uses the idea of sanctity of life as an example:

---

to contemporary religion, on the other hand, my focus on Christianity first, and Islam and Judaism next, is unintended but unavoidable: I simply do not know enough about other religions to write with any confidence about them."

41. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 60.

42. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 61.

43. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 279.

> The principle of the Sanctity of Human Life sounds bracingly clear and absolute: every human life is equally sacred, equally inviolable; as with the king in chess, no price can be placed on it—aside from "infinity," since to lose it is to lose everything. But in fact we all know that life isn't, and can't be, like chess. There are multitudes of interfering "games" going on at once. What are we to do when more than one human life is at stake? If each life is *infinitely* valuable and none more valuable than another, how are we to dole out the *few* transplantable kidneys that are available, for instance?[44]

Since it is impossible to live a totally moral life in accord with Scripture, Dennett is claiming that there is no practical reason to hold onto what Scripture says at all.

Dennett's warrant in making these arguments is clear: Something must be practical and workable for the majority for it to be useful. If religious morals cannot be carried out practically and in a workable way, they are not useful. This also gives an insight into Dennett's worldview. He is looking for practicality; he is a pragmatist. For him, it seems that only those things that are demonstrably useful should be considered good. This also explains Dennett's views on authority. The only authority for Dennett is whatever is pragmatically good.

Dennett's ethical argument is also in view when he talks about morality:

> Those who maintain religions, and take steps to make them more attractive, must be held similarly responsible for the harms produced by some of those whom they attract and provide with a cloak of respectability. Defenders of religion are quick to point out that terrorists typically have political, not religious agendas, which may well be true in many or most cases, or even in all cases, but that is not the end of it. The political agendas of violent fanatics often lead them to adopt a religious guise, and to exploit the organizational infrastructure and tradition of unquestioning loyalty of whichever religion is handy. And it is true that these fanatics are rarely if ever inspired by, or guided by, the deepest and best tenets in those religious traditions. So what? Al Qaeda and Hamas terrorism is still Islam's responsibility, and abortion-clinic bombing is still Christianity's responsibility, and the murderous activities of Hindu extremists are still Hinduism's responsibility.[45]

---

44. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 294. It is important to note that Dennett does make some good points in asking these questions. Sanctity of life questions (like all questions in a sinful world) can be hard to answer. However, he fails to see that in a sinful world, there will be no perfect answers.

45. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 299.

Dennett is trying to say that moderates need to fix their religions. "We must hold these moderate Muslims responsible for reshaping their own religion—but that means we must equally hold moderate Christians and Jews and others responsible for all the excesses in their own traditions."[46]

He makes a fair point in saying that there is fanaticism in religion, but to say that any type of terrorism is the fault of the religion that someone belongs to shows a lack of sense. To advocate that whole religions should be blamed for the actions of specific people does not seem to be either practical or workable for most people, especially since Dennett gives no explanation of "fanatics" or "moderates." He does not even give people some sort of common ground to use to define someone else as a "fanatic" or a "moderate." As mentioned above, he refuses to see the Bible as a candidate for common ground. While that is fair (based on which authorities he is willing to recognize), if he is going to state that there are "fanatics" and "moderates" within religions, there must some sort of markers in order to discern the two.

Sam Harris

Sam Harris is the cofounder and CEO of Project Reason, which aims to spread scientific knowledge and secular values in society. He also holds degrees in philosophy and neuroscience. In *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Harris takes on the beliefs of Christians. To a certain extent, the arguments in this book are not as polished because, as the title suggests, this is a letter. However, Harris's arguments are still pertinent.

Harris starts out with an assumption of why Christians believe what they believe: "You believe that the Bible is the word of God, that Jesus is the Son of God, and that only those who

46. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell,* 300.

place their faith in Jesus will find salvation after death. As a Christian, you believe these propositions not because they make you feel good, but because you think they are true."[47] It is clear from this statement that Harris knows Christianity's focus. He even expresses the fact that if he persists in unbelief he will "suffer the torments of hell."[48] It seems like he understands what he is going to argue against.

Harris, like Dawkins and Dennett believes that religion is harmful to the world. He bases this upon his definition of morality: "Questions about morality are questions about happiness and suffering."[49] In other words, as Harris looks at morality, he is looking at the outcomes of actions. If the action causes happiness, it is moral. If the action causes suffering, it is immoral.

This may seem fine, but the examples that Harris uses leave much to be desired. When talking about stem-cell research and abortion, he writes:

> The moral truth here is obvious: anyone who feels that the interests of a blastocyst just might supersede the interests of a child with a spinal cord injury has had his moral sense blinded by religious metaphysics. The link between religion and "morality"—so regularly proclaimed and so seldom demonstrated—is fully belied here, as it is wherever religious dogma supersedes moral reasoning and genuine compassion.[50]

Harris is saying that in practice, Christians care more about the unborn than those who are already alive. He is also advocating that abortion is morally good because it can result in happiness for others. However, for someone that clearly has read Scripture[51], Harris has missed that Christians consider all lives to be important. He is making a distinction where a Christian

---

47. Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 3.

48. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 3–4.

49. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 8.

50. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 32.

51. Harris quotes Scripture throughout *Letter to a Christian Nation*.

would not. Christians would not make this distinction because they would still see the unborn child as a child rather than just a "blastocyst." It is also inconsistent with his statement, "Abortion is an ugly reality, and we should all hope for breakthroughs in contraception that reduce the need for it,"[52] just a few pages later. If this is an "ugly reality" how can Harris also advocate for it as morally good?

Harris's argument about abortion helps to show that his warrant is like Dennett's. If something results in general happiness, it is morally good and should be advocated for. Harris too is a pragmatist because he looks at the world around him as the ultimate judge. He describes his thoughts about religion very clearly:

> The truth is, you [Christians] know exactly what it is like to be an atheist with respect to the beliefs of Muslims. Isn't it obvious that Muslims are fooling themselves? Isn't it obvious that anyone who thinks that the Koran is the perfect word of the creator of the universe has not read the book critically? Isn't it obvious that the doctrine of Islam represents a near-perfect barrier to honest inquiry? Yes, these things are obvious. Understand that the way you view Islam is precisely the way devout Muslims view Christianity. And it is the way I view all religions.[53]

Clearly, Harris's worldview is one in which religion has no use because he believes religions to be false.

Because of this worldview, Harris's arguments rest on the ability of humans to understand the world around them and to explain it. His view of authority is not based on any sacred writings, so he feels comfortable attacking Scripture's authority. He uses this logic to warn Christians about the formation of Scripture:

> But just imagine how breathtakingly specific a work of prophecy would be, if it were actually the product of omniscience. If the Bible were such a book, it would make perfectly accurate predictions about human events. You would expect it to contain a passage such as "In the latter half of the twentieth century, humankind will develop a

52. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 36.

53. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 7.

> globally linked system of computers—the principles of which I set forth in Leviticus—and this system shall be called the Internet." The Bible contains nothing like this. In fact, it does not contain a single sentence that could not have been written by a man or woman living in the first century. This should trouble you.[54]

Again, for someone that has read Scripture, this argument is strange. It does not seem to be an argument made in good faith, but rather an argument based on an arbitrary definition of prophecy.

Although Scripture does not predict the Internet, it does predict some other things that Harris ignored. The Old Testament canon was well-established by the time Jesus walked the earth. Isaiah had prophesied centuries before that there would be "a voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD'" (Isa 40:3). All four Gospels allude to this when speaking about John the Baptist (Matt 3:3; Mark 1:2; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). To ignore something like this harms Harris's own argument. Firstly, it shows that prophecy was included in Scripture—and demonstrably so—whether Harris believes it or not. It also shows that portions of Scripture were written before the first century as Matt, Mark, Luke, and John all attribute the prophecy to Isaiah.

A Few Commonalities

It is worthwhile to note a few of the commonalities found amongst these atheist authors. Firstly, Dawkins, Dennett, and Harris all focused on math and science as sources for what they believe. They derived their ideas of morality from what works in their opinion, without any thought about things innate in humanity or with a universal scope.

54. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 60.

Although their warrants were a tad different, they all point to a similar worldview. These three atheists all focus on the belief that they could answer any of the big questions in life with their own logic. This affected their view of authority, as they were unwilling to consider any explanations that involved anything supernatural. This also affected their ethical arguments, because they often lacked the good sense, good will, or moral integrity that Corbett mentioned above, when it came to scriptural matters.

For all three of these authors, moral integrity seemed to be lacking based on their views of Scripture as a unit. Because of their view of authority, they would have no reason to see Scripture as a cohesive book. However, to properly speak about Christianity, one should treat Scripture as a Christian would. When any of these authors ignored how Scripture speaks about itself in order to make their own points, it showed a lack of sense at best and a lack of morality at worst.

PART 4: CHRISTIAN APOLOGISTS

Popular Christian apologists have a different worldview than the atheists. However, there is also a difference between these apologists and the way that Lutherans deal with apologetics. Because the Lutherans have a different warrant than these authors, they will be talked about separately.

W. Mark Lanier

W. Mark Lanier is a lawyer and Christian apologist. In his book *Christianity on Trial: A Lawyer Examines the Christian Faith*, he uses his courtroom tactics to defend the truth of what Scripture says. He begins by explaining that courtrooms are the best place to derive truth: "Experience has indicated that there is no other human institution that can so readily sift through and weigh information to derive trustworthy conclusions."[55] This says a lot about Lanier's worldview. He considers a courtroom setting to be the best place to determine truth. This is very different from the authors mentioned above. In fact, Lanier is of the opinion that questions concerning Scripture cannot be answered through experimental science and statistics:

> Laboratories are marvelous places to answer questions of chemistry, physics and biology. But can you answer "Who ran the red light?" with test tubes and a calculator? No. Not even when we are confident that someone indeed did run a red light. That answer is best found from an investigation of evidence, eyewitness accounts, pictures, examining the scene, evaluating the skid marks and so forth.[56]

55. W. Mark Lanier, *Christianity on Trial: A Lawyer Examines the Christian Faith*, (Downers Gove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), Introduction. I have access to this book through Logos Bible Software. Because this edition does not include page numbers, I will include the section from which quotes are taken.

56. Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, Introduction.

According to Lanier, to properly study what Scripture has to say, it is best to study it based on historical evidence rather than scientific evidence. The question to be answered is "What happened?" which is best done through historical accounts.

In an aside, Lanier explains how science and theology are different:

> Science tells us how things are, while theology gives us the explanation of why things are. Historically, people have been prone to assign events to God when they did not understand the scientific reason for the event. For example, the reason the sun got dark was because God turned it out. God became responsible for the gaps in human knowledge. Assigning unknown science to God is a theological mistake. God created the world to function not as a puppet on which he pulls strings but as an entity following the rules he put in place.[57]

This explains Lanier's worldview. He believes that science and theology should both be respected, but he wants them to stay in their respective lanes. Science should not try to prove or disprove God and theology should not wade too deeply into the waters of science. This also gives insight into Lanier's concept of authority. He sees science and Scripture as both having authority, but they have authority in different spheres.

Lanier also states his warrant for why he is making the arguments he does. He wants to find consistency: "One of the things I always look for in any argument is consistency. Does an argument have internal consistency? Can a position be tested and measured against other beliefs to determine consistency? That is important in direct evidence, but it is critically important when assessing circumstantial evidence."[58] In other words, if Scripture is the "argument" it must be internally consistent and consistent with the world that Lanier sees around himself.

Lanier talks about this sort of consistency when he asks a colleague, Mike, why he would not eat another person. Mike does not think this would be right, so Lanier concludes:

---

57. Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, Ch. 4.

58. Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, Ch. 2.

> My suggestion, of course, was that we were looking at another way that Mike's life and his core beliefs were actually aligned with the idea that there is a God who has made humans special ("in his image" is the biblical phrase) and hence different from all other animals. Of course, without a God there is no "image," and the uniqueness that flows from that is gone. This is circumstantial evidence.[59]

Lanier's point here is that God claims that people are made in his image in Gen 1:27 and 9:6, and that this also holds true in how people act in the world.[60]

Finally, Lanier's arguments from authority are based on the facts presented in the Bible. To establish authority, he explains that the witnesses in Scripture are trustworthy.[61] This is a good ethical argument, because Lanier shows that Scripture is trustworthy based on the character of the authors and how close they were to what they claimed happened.[62] In showing their trustworthiness, Lanier points out:

> In my courtroom experience, anytime two stories are identical, there is a strong likelihood of collusion. The truth is eyewitnesses notice different things…. Much has been made over whether the biblical eyewitness accounts are consistent. On core matters they certainly are. Only on minor matters are different facts presented, none of which undermine a coherent narrative. All of the accounts include (1) the crucifixion of Jesus, (2) his death on the cross, (3) his burial in the tomb of a noteworthy citizen who could be examined for the truth, (4) his resurrection on the third day and (5) witnesses to the empty tomb. Matthew, Luke and John also name witnesses who encountered the physically resurrected Jesus.[63]

This argument not only shows Lanier's warrant that Scripture is the basis for his proof, but also that it is trustworthy. In doing this, and in narrowing his focus to the history of the matter as mentioned above, Lanier crafts an ethical argument that makes sense with his view on biblical

---

59. Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, Ch. 2.

60. I realize that Lanier's understanding of the *imago Dei* is not the same as Lutheran readers would understand it. However, this example does serve as an example of his style of argument.

61. Lanier does this throughout *Christianity on Trial* by explaining who the different witnesses were. The best example of this is found in Chapter 10, where he talks about witnesses of the resurrection.

62. Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, Ch. 10.

63. Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, Ch. 10.

authority. When it comes to the ethical argument he creates, he does not contradict himself, nor does he ignore things with which he should be interacting. Even though he does not take much time to talk about science, as noted above, he does not attack it either. He merely points out that science and theology have different focuses.

C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis's book, *Mere Christianity*, was originally several lectures that he gave over the radio during World War II. His intent was to explain the general truths of Christianity to his fellow countrymen during that trying time. His arguments are split into four parts, beginning with the natural knowledge of right and wrong, moving to general Christian truths, and then to morality. He ends the book with a discussion of the Trinity.

Lewis's first argument is that everyone has an innate sense of right and wrong. "Quarrelling means trying to show that the other man is wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are."[64] The point is that people inherently know what it means to do something right or wrong. Lewis is making an appeal to the fact that everyone has some form of conscience.

This may at first seem like a strange point to make. No person has the same thought process as another. Yet, Lewis presses the point, explaining:

> This Rule of Right and Wrong, or Law of Human Nature, or whatever you call it, must somehow or other be a real thing—a thing that is really there, not made up by ourselves. And yet it is not a fact in the ordinary sense, in the same way as our actual behaviour is a fact. It begins to look as if we shall have to admit that there is more than one kind of reality; that, in this particular case, there is something above and beyond the ordinary facts of men's behaviour, and yet quite definitely real—a real law, which none of us made, but which we find pressing on us.[65]

---

64. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 4.

65. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 20.

In making this statement, Lewis is expressing one of his warrants. He believes that there must be something beyond what humans see in the world, because there is a tendency to understand right and wrong. He goes on to make the point, "If there is 'Something Behind', then either it will have to remain altogether unknown to men or else make itself known in some different way."[66] Thus, Lewis's warrant is that a higher power of some sort must exist and must reveal itself in order for people to know about it.

As has been shown, Lewis believed that God revealed himself through natural law. Lewis also shows that he believes the God of the Bible to be the true God. He says this because only the Christian God serves as both the supreme judge and the supreme comfort:

> God is the only comfort, He is also the supreme terror: the thing we most need and the thing we most want to hide from. He is our only possible ally, and we have made ourselves His enemies. Some people talk as if meeting the gaze of absolute goodness would be fun. They need to think again. They are still only playing with religion. Goodness is either the great safety or the great danger—according to the way you react to it. And we have reacted the wrong way.[67]

All this shows that God judges those who do wrong, but he also promises forgiveness. Lewis once again expresses this warrant by pointing to the work of Christ and the Christian response:

> The perfect surrender and humiliation were undergone by Christ: perfect because He was God, surrender and humiliation because He was man. Now the Christian belief is that if we somehow share the humility and suffering of Christ we shall also share in His conquest of death and find a new life after we have died and in it become perfect, and perfectly happy, creatures.[68]

Simply stated, Lewis is also working with the warrant that human beings have a natural knowledge of God based on their knowledge of right and wrong. His statements about Christ also show that Lewis considers Scripture to be authoritative.

---

66. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 23.

67. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 31.

68. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 60.

All of this shows that Lewis is working through a Christian worldview, where Scripture answers the question of where he came from and why the world is the way that it is. However, Lewis's worldview is also tempered by the fact that he started life as an atheist. In fact, his former atheism helps explain some of the ways that he argues in *Mere Christianity*.

Lewis's ethical arguments are based on his warrants and his past atheism. He makes it clear that Scripture is God's statement to people concerning his own nature. In pointing this out, Lewis attacks atheism as considering Christianity too simply:

> Such people put up a version of Christianity suitable for a child of six and make that the object of their attack. When you try to explain the Christian doctrine as it is really held by an instructed adult, they then complain that you are making their heads turn round and that it is all too complicated and that if there really were a God they are sure He would have made 'religion' simple, because simplicity is so beautiful, etc…. Notice, too, their idea of God 'making religion simple'; as if 'religion' were something God invented, and not His statement to us of certain quite unalterable facts about His own nature.[69]

Taken by itself, this may seem like a lapse in judgment on Lewis's part. It may come off as offensive to an atheist to compare their version of Christianity as too simple. However, this serves (1) as a warning to Christians concerning what many atheists do and (2) as a warning to atheists to properly understand what they are rejecting.

Lewis knows about atheism firsthand, since he was an atheist for a long time. He writes later:

> Everyone reads, everyone hears things discussed. Consequently, if you do not listen to Theology, that will not mean that you have no ideas about God. It will mean that you have a lot of wrong ones—bad, muddled, out-of-date ideas. For a great many of the ideas about God which are trotted out as novelties today are simply the ones which real Theologians tried centuries ago and rejected. To believe in the popular religion of modern England is retrogression—like believing the earth is flat.[70]

---

69. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 41.

70. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 155.

Lewis's ethical point here makes a lot of sense. He is not calling atheists simplistic or dumb, rather he is encouraging them to properly know what they are arguing against before taking on Christianity. This shows both common sense and good will, even for those who disagree with him. Considering how much space is taken up by talk about Christian morality[71], this shows that not only does Lewis believe what he is saying, but he attempts to practice it.

Lee Strobel

Lee Strobel was a legal editor for the *Chicago Tribune* and an atheist. After his wife became a Christian, Strobel went on a quest to better understand what his wife believed. As documented in *The Case for Christ: Solving the Biggest Mystery of All Time*, Strobel did a lot of work, researching Scripture the same way he would research cases.

In some ways, it might seem problematic for an atheist to start a study like this. One might assume that he would only do research that agreed with his beliefs. However, Strobel did what he could to be fair. "Setting aside my self-interest and prejudices as best I could, I read books, interviewed experts, asked questions, analyzed history, explored archaeology, studied ancient literature, and for the first time in my life picked apart the Bible verse by verse."[72] Strobel wanted to give Scripture as fair of a hearing as he could. He also considered the people he interviewed to be the experts who had the authority to answer his questions.

---

71. Book 3 of *Mere Christianity* is entitled "Christian Behaviour" and takes up pages 69–150. This is the longest of the four books in *Mere Christianity*. This also involves Lewis's worldview at the time. In the middle of war-torn Britain in World War II, people were very concerned with morality.

72. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: Solving the Biggest Mystery of All Time*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 14.

His main warrant in writing this book is that the Bible (specifically Christ's resurrection) can be proven as fact based on outside, circumstantial evidence. "Over time the evidence of the world—of history, of science, of philosophy, of psychology—began to point toward the unthinkable."[73] The backing for Strobel's warrant comes from his interviews with experts in different fields, which are all concerned with different facets of biblical study.

An example of this is his talk with Dr. Craig Blomberg. Strobel interviewed Blomberg about the trustworthiness of the Gospels. Strobel had challenged Blomberg, trying to show that the material of the Bible was not truly historical. He pointed out that Christians believed that Jesus spoke through them in prophecy. Since this was the case, he hypothesized that there was no way to know for certain that the words recorded in Scripture were historically accurate, since they could have been a blend of both Jesus's actual sayings and later sayings from these prophets.[74] Blomberg had an interesting answer, citing how Jesus was quoted in the New Testament, but also pointing to church controversies:

> These issues [church controversies] could have been conveniently resolved if the early Christians had simply read back into the gospels what Jesus had told them from the world beyond. But this never happened. The continuance of these controversies demonstrates that Christians were interested in distinguishing between what happened during Jesus' lifetime and what was debated later in the churches.[75]

Blomberg's words make it clear that Christians were concerned with preserving the history of what actually happened. If they were not concerned with history, they could have changed whatever they wanted and avoided controversy.

---

73. Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 15.

74. Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 44.

75. Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 45.

An interview like this shows Strobel's view on authority. He interviewed people that were considered experts in their fields and always gave an explanation as to why he was interviewing that particular person.[76] Reading through the explanations shows that Strobel was looking for people that knew what they were talking about. However, Strobel was also looking for people who would clearly lay out the facts without having their judgement clouded. This can be seen in his explanation for why he interviewed Dr. Alexander Metherell:

> I had sought out Metherell because I heard he possessed the medical and scientific credentials to explain the crucifixion. But I also had another motivation: I had been told he could discuss the topic dispassionately as well as accurately. That was important to me, because I wanted the facts to speak for themselves, without the hyperbole or charged language that might otherwise manipulate emotions.[77]

This speaks strongly concerning Stobel's ethics. Strobel used good sense, good will, and moral integrity in his work, all of which are very important to ethical arguments as mentioned above. This serves as proof that Strobel had done his research carefully and accurately.

A Few Commonalities

One of the things that sticks out when reading popular Christian apologists is their interest in history and literature rather than mathematics and science. A big part of this is because they focus on what the Bible says and how it should be interpreted, which is not a scientific question. This is a major difference between the Christians and the atheists; they argue from different worldviews and with different views of what holds authority.

Because of their view that Scripture has absolute authority, Christians work within the boundaries of what Scripture has revealed. Since these boundaries are set up, Christians tend to

---

76. Strobel includes brief biographies and points out the pedigrees of every person he interviewed.

77. Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 210.

argue by chiefly using Scripture and the history around it. Because of this view of authority, Christians do not focus on scientific data to answer their worldview questions. This is a clear difference between the Christian and atheist apologists, because their answer to worldview questions comes from different authorities.

PART 5: SCRIPTURE AND THE LUTHERAN APPROACH

Lutherans have a different take on apologetics and how it should be used. Since this is the case, the Lutheran position and the warrants that exist in Scripture will be handled here.

The Lutheran Understanding of Apologetics

Christian apologists all have a similar goal in defending Scripture. They want to show that there is some reason behind what they believe; they are not just blind believers. However, most apologists also have another goal. For example, W. Mark Lanier writes, "The verdict can then be determined. Each person has to decide how to live in light of the verdict he or she reaches."[78] C. S. Lewis joins him saying one must "hand your whole self—all your wishes and precautions—over to Christ."[79] Lee Strobel speaks in the same manner: "In the end the verdict is yours and yours alone. Nobody else can cast the ballot for you."[80] These statements make it clear that these authors all want people to make a decision. Yes, they realize not everyone will come to the same conclusions as they, but they still want people to give themselves to Christ.

This is where Lutheranism takes a different approach to apologetics. Adolf Hoenecke wrote, "The task of apologetics is to testify against the doubts and temptations of reason the truth of Christianity that in Christ the revelation of God has actually taken place."[81] Notice that

78. Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, Ch. 1.

79. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 197.

80. Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 292.

81. Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 4 vols., trans. James Langebartels and Heinrich Vogel (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2009), 1:273.

Hoenecke does not mention convincing people that they too should believe what is stated in Scripture. Francis Pieper agrees with Hoenecke:

> And let us add that the only way of transmitting the supernatural truths to man is through this creation of a new psychology in him. There is nothing in the psychology of the natural man that will respond to these truths. The Gospel of Christ Crucified has never "entered into the heart of man" (1 Cor. 2:9; Rom. 16:25). And worse, it is to every natural man a "stumbling block" and "foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:14). The arguments supplied by the science of apologetics—and there is a great wealth of them—cannot change the human heart, cannot produce an inner acceptance of the Gospel.[82]

Lutherans do not see arguments as able to change a person's heart. This particular worldview changes how Lutherans approach apologetics compared to other Christians.

Biblical Warrants

It is important to understand that the Bible itself works with warrants. To use an example from above, Jesus assumed that the Pharisees considered the Old Testament to be God's Word when he said in Matt 12:3–5, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent?" Jesus never has to explain that the Old Testament is God's Word or that it carries authority. He assumes that is understood.

Another example of this can be seen in Paul's words to Timothy. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17). Clearly,

82. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols., trans. Theodore Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 1:65.

Paul assumes that Timothy understands what he is saying. There is an implicit argument that Timothy knows exactly what "Scripture" Paul is speaking about.

Another warrant in Scripture is that all people are unable to come to God on their own. Paul makes this clear in Eph 2:1, when he writes, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." In other words, no man can come to God, because he is spiritually dead. The only way for anyone to believe is through God's mercy. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:4–5). The only way for man to come to faith is through God's mercy.

One final warrant of Scripture is that God works through means. In Rom 10, Paul makes this clear: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them (14)?" In other words, to believe, someone must first hear the good news of what Christ has done for them. Apologetics may be helpful for the person that is struggling, but it does not take the place of the gospel itself. This is why Pieper writes:

> It would be overestimation if we imagined that any one could be converted by such rational arguments. A man becomes a Christian, in every single case and until the Last Day, only in one way: by way of *contritio and fides;* that is, he must experience the divine judgement of condemnation, which the Law, speaking through Scripture, produces (*terrores conscientiae*) and believe in the remission of his sins through the Gospel, proclaimed in Scripture. This way of coming into His kingdom is taught by Christ when he instructs His disciples "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations" (Luke 24:47), and when He Himself proclaimed: "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). Only after a person has in this manner become a sheep of Christ's fold, only after the Holy Ghost has entered his heart by faith in the forgiveness of sins, does he know that the Scriptures are God's Word.[83]

83. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:310–11.

Lutheran Arguments

Because of the biblical view of human nature and biblical inerrancy, Lutheran arguments are different. Rather than relying on both the Bible and human proofs, Lutherans only rely on the Bible to convince people of its truth. Siegbert Becker explains that this is because human reason has been corrupted by sin:

> Faith humbles itself before God and clings to his Word as the source of wisdom and truth. Reason, on the other hand, in its corruption and pride, always makes the mistake of exalting its very limited experience and equating it with omniscience. When Luther says that reason judges by the "isolated instances and beginnings" of evil, he points to a basic weakness of the Aristotelian and scholastic approach to truth. It is the very nature of inductive reasoning that most of its universals are theoretical constructions. Reason is not able to acquire universal truth just because man is not God.[84]

According to Becker, human reason is corrupt and unable to comprehend or acquire truth. Therefore, the only authority concerning absolute truth is what God has revealed to his creatures.

Becker continues by explaining that Lutheran apologetics does not have to do primarily with arguments outside of Scripture:

> We shall, therefore, be well equipped to defend the articles of faith against all the temptations of the devil if we are well grounded in God's Word and cling to it firmly when the devil seeks to overthrow our faith with clever fables, which are brought forth out of human understanding and reason. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. It clings only to the bare Word of God, and lets itself be guided by what it sees in the Word, even if it sees many other things which tempt it to look upon what the Word says as vain and useless.[85]

Paul also points out that God works through "the foolishness of what was preached" (1 Cor 1:21). Since Lutherans base their arguments on Scripture's authority, Becker's argument makes good sense. Anything outside of Scripture is tainted with sin in the Lutheran view, so only that which is based on Scripture can be trustworthy.

---

84. Siegbert W. Becker, *The Foolishness of God: The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1982), 101–2.

85. Becker, *The Foolishness of God*, 162.

Luke Thompson explained the goal of Lutheran apologetics perfectly: "The goal of Lutheran apologetics is never to show how reasonable our faith is, but rather to point out that the unreasonable did, in fact, take place. There is nothing reasonable about Jesus dying and rising for my sins, but that does not change the fact that it happened and was documented for my benefit."[86] The whole point for a Lutheran is to show people that Scripture has documented the truth. They do not look to get someone to turn themselves toward Christ based on human arguments. Although outside evidence is important, it is not where faith rests. As Thompson states, "The Lutheran theologian, as we will note, is not primarily interested in data (although this is of enormous importance, just not primary), but rather what might be the proper use in employing that data."[87] Lutherans look at apologetics as a means to an end (getting someone to hear the gospel) rather than a way to get people to believe in Christ.

86. Luke George Thompson, "An Apologetic of the Cross as a Lutheran Approach to 21st Century Apologetics Centered on the Hiddenness of God," MDiv thesis, (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2013), 37.

87. Thompson, "An Apologetic of the Cross," 12.

PART 6: CONCLUSION

I opened this paper wondering why there were differences between atheist and Christian apologetics. It was clear that there was some sort of disconnect in the arguments being made, but it was hard to discern what the exact difference was. Worldview and warrants seemed to be the answer. Christians view the world one way and atheists view it another. This causes different implicit arguments for both sides.

While this is true, it is not the only cause of the differences in arguments. Another major factor is where atheists and Christians find authority. Worldview shapes where authority comes from. Warrants express the implicit arguments that come from these views concerning authority.

Atheists can and do make good arguments, especially when they are focusing on experimental science and statistics. However, the atheist apologists mentioned in this paper make poor ethical arguments, because of their view of Scripture. If someone wants to explain the world through science, that is all well and good, but then they must be careful when bringing religion into their arguments. When Dawkins, Dennett, and Harris used Scripture, their arguments fell apart, due to bad sense, bad will, or even poor moral integrity. This is not surprising, considering their view on the authority of empirical data and their low view of Scripture.

Christians on the other hand see authority differently. Because they consider Scripture to be the highest authority, Christians argue differently. Lanier, Lewis, and Strobel did not attempt to disprove science, because their arguments did not deal with science. To attack science would have caused people to discredit them, because it would have lacked sense and good will.

However, their warrant concerning people needing to make a decision about the evidence they provided showed a reliance on the authority of human arguments along with Scripture.

Lutherans argue in a slightly different manner. They focus on Scripture as the authoritative proof for what they believe. Instead of using empirical data or human arguments, Lutherans preach what Scripture teaches, trusting that God will use that to create faith. Arguments do not serve to prove or disprove what they believe, but to open doors for discussion.

Understanding where other people are arguing from is important. We Lutherans should listen and learn what someone's worldview is and what they consider to be authoritative. We must also know where we are coming from as we speak to others. To effectively speak to people about what we believe, we must pay attention to the fact that there will be differences between our views and someone else's. We should be open about our worldview and our warrants so that we do not talk past people. As we do this, we should focus on Scripture's authority and power the way the apostle John did: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Becker, Siegbert W., *The Foolishness of God: The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther*. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1982.

Braet, Antoine "The Classical Doctrine of *Status* and the Rhetorical Theory of Argumentation." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1987): 79–93.

Corbett, Edward P. J., *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Dawkins, Richard, *The God Delusion*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Dennett, Daniel C., *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Harris, Sam, *Letter to a Christian Nation*. New York: Vintage Books, 2008.

Helve, Helena and Michael Pye, "Theoretical correlation's between world-view, civil religion, institutional religion and informal spiritualities." *Temenos* 37-38 (2001-2002): 87–106.

Hoenecke, Adolf, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 4 vols. Translated by James Langebartels and Heinrich Vogel. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2009.

Horne, Milton P., "Teaching Religious Doubt with Toulmin's Model of Reasoning." *Teaching Theology and Religion*, vol. 11 no. 4 (2008): 203–212.

Lanier, W. Mark, *Christianity on Trial: A Lawyer Examines the Christian Faith*. Downers Gove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014.

Lewis, C. S., *Mere Christianity*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Pieper, Francis, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. Translated by Theodore Engelder. St. Louis: Concordia, 1950.

Strobel, Lee, *The Case for Christ: Solving the Biggest Mystery of All Time*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.

Thompson, Luke George, "An Apologetic of the Cross as a Lutheran Approach to 21st Century Apologetics Centered on the Hiddenness of God." MDiv thesis. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2013.

Toulmin, Stephen E., *The Uses of Argument*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003

Wendland, Paul, "Preaching Today." Paper presented at the 52nd Annual Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures, Mankato, MN, October 2019.