

# Faith, Reason, and an Appropriate Apologetic Against Materialistic Atheism<sup>1</sup>

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Atheist writers have flooded the market with books expressing the idea that faith, far from being a virtue, is actually a hindrance to intelligent research and genuine knowledge acquisition.<sup>2</sup> According to popular atheist thought, because faith stands in opposition to reason, faith is not only irrational, but ultimately destructive to human life.<sup>3</sup> Not only is this common atheist understanding of faith and its influence completely false, but, as will be shown, the existence of faith itself strongly attests to the truth of Christian theism.

Though atheist thinkers today commonly define faith as belief in that for which there is no evidence, this definition is far from the New Testament use of the term. The English word *faith* is the usual translation of the Greek word *pistis*, which is related to the verb *peitho*. The primary meaning is of this term is “to convince (by argument).”<sup>4</sup> Examples of this use of *peitho* are found in Matthew 27:20, 28:14; Luke 16:31, 20:6; Acts 13:4; 14:19; 18:4; 19:8, 26; 21:14; 26:26, 28; 28:23; Romans 8:38; 14:14; 15:14; 2 Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 1:10; 2 Timothy 1:5, 12; Hebrews 6:9 and 11:13. Eugene Garver notes that, “*pistis* can be rightly translated as proof, argument, reasoning,

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<sup>1</sup>“An” appropriate apologetic must not be understood as *the only* appropriate apologetic; the writer sees more than one valid and useful approach to rationally defending the Christian faith.

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For instance, Jeffery Olsson, *Leaving Faith Behind* (Xlibris, 2009), pp. 113-114.

<sup>3</sup>

George Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Promethius Books, 1974), Introduction, as quoted in debate, Greg Bahnsen vs. George Smith, *The Case for/Against God*, mp3 and transcript available at [www.trueforms.wordpress.com/2013/08/10/greg-bahnsen-vs-george-smith-debate-transcript](http://www.trueforms.wordpress.com/2013/08/10/greg-bahnsen-vs-george-smith-debate-transcript) (Accessed Sept 2, 2014).

<sup>4</sup>*The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), p. 678.

persuasion, belief, trust, faith, conviction, obligation and confidence.”<sup>5</sup> William M. A.

Grimaldi explains that *pistis*,

"is used to represent the state of mind, namely, conviction or belief, at which the auditor arrives when the correctly chosen aspects of the subject-matter are placed before him in an effective manner. . . In its second meaning, *pistis* is the word used for a methodological technique . . . In this sense, *pistis* means the logical instrument used by the mind to marshal the material into a reasoning process. It is a method which gives the matter a logical form, so to speak, and thus produces that state of mind in the auditor which is called belief, *pistis*.”<sup>6</sup>

In the biblical sense then, faith is not a blind, irrational leap into the dark. Rather, faith is belief in that which one has become *convinced* of.

The Epistle to the Hebrews contains what is perhaps the most definitive passage concerning the nature of faith. The eleventh chapter begins, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).<sup>7</sup> According to Arthur L. Farstad et al., the term translated “substance” (*hupostasis*) has a variety of meanings. Its standard meaning is *substantial nature, essence, actual being, or reality*. Depending on context, this term may also be rendered, *confidence* or *assurance*.<sup>8</sup> Marvin R. Vincent states that in this important passage, the term “faith” appears,

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Eugene Garver, *For the sake of argument: practical reasoning, character and the ethics of belief* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> William M. A. Grimaldi, "Studies in the Philosophy of Aristotle's Rhetoric." *Landmark Essays on Aristotelian Rhetoric*, ed. by Richard Leo Enos and Lois Peters Agnew. Routledge, 1998) as quoted by Richard Nordquist at [www.grammar.about.com/od/pq/g/pistis.htm](http://www.grammar.about.com/od/pq/g/pistis.htm) (Accessed August 28, 2014).

<sup>7</sup>All Scripture is from the *King James Version*.

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Arthur L. Farstad, Zane C. Hodges, C. Michael Moss, Robert E. Picirilli, Wilbur N. Pickering, *Majority Text Greek New Testament Interlinear* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), p. 755.

without the article, indicating that it is treated in its abstract conception, and not merely as Christian faith. . . . Faith apprehends as a real fact what is not revealed to the senses. It rests on that fact, acts upon it, and is upheld by it in the face of all that seems to contradict it. Faith is a real seeing.<sup>9</sup>

After examining the many shades of meaning *hupostasis* can have, Vincent concludes:

*Assurance* gives the true meaning. . . . The meaning *substance, real being* . . . suggests the true sense, but is philosophically inaccurate. *Substance*, as used by these translators, is . . . improperly applied to faith, which is *an act* of the moral intelligence directed at an object; or *a condition* which sustains a certain relation to the object. It cannot be said that faith is substantial being. It *apprehends* reality: it is that to which the unseen objects of hope become real and substantial. *Assurance* gives the true idea. It is the firm grasp of faith on unseen fact.<sup>10</sup>

Thomas Hewitt concurs, noting that, “Substance can hardly mean reality here, for faith does not bestow reality on things which have no substance or reality in themselves. It may have the same meaning as in iii.14, making faith the confidence or assurance of things hoped for.”<sup>11</sup> Farstad et al. see Hebrews 11:1 as permitting either meaning of *hupostasis*: “Faith could be described as the assurance and confidence or things hoped for, or as the substantial nature and reality of those things.”<sup>12</sup> Edwards sees both renderings of the term as complementary rather than exclusive:

“Faith bridges over the chasm between hope and the things hoped for. . . . [hupostasis] describes confidence as a reality, resting on an unshakable foundation, and contrasted with illusions. [The writer to the Hebrews] has urged Christians to boldness of action and fullness of conviction. Now he adds that faith

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<sup>9</sup>Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), available online at [www.studylight.org/commentaries/vnt/view.cgi?bk&ch11](http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/vnt/view.cgi?bk&ch11) (Accessed Aug 28, 2014).

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>

Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 171.

<sup>12</sup>

Farstad et al., p. 755.

is that boldness and that wealth of certitude in so far as they rest upon reality and truth.”<sup>13</sup>

According to Moulton and Milligan, the term was commonly used on papyri in business documents as the basis or guarantee of transactions. They suggest “Faith is the title-deed of things hoped for” as the proper translation of Hebrews 11:1.<sup>14</sup> John MacArthur notes that Hebrews 11:1 is “written in the style of Hebrew poetry . . . in which two parallel and nearly identical phrases are used to state the same thing.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, the meaning of “Faith is the substance of things hoped for” is nearly identical to faith being “the evidence of things not seen.” Support for Moulton and Milligan’s rendering of the text may therefore be found in Jeremiah 32:10-16. Here the *King James Version* translates the Hebrew, *siphrâh*, which in context refers to the title deed to property,<sup>16</sup> as *evidence*. MacArthur adds that, “the faith described here involves the most solid possible conviction, the God-given present assurance of a future reality.”<sup>17</sup> Whatever the precise translation of Hebrews 11:1, it is clear that Christian faith involves both objective, external reality as well as internal certainty. Furthermore, no proper and adequate account of Christian faith can be made without reference to its volitional aspect as well. Faith is

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Thomas Charles Edwards, *The Expositor’s Bible*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), p. 531.

<sup>14</sup>

James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 660.

<sup>15</sup>

John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1997), p. 1916.

<sup>16</sup> “The purchase deed” (NKJV), “The deed of purchase” (ASV), “The writing of the purchase” (Darby), “The book of the possession (Geneva).

<sup>17</sup>

MacArthur, p. 1916.

the substance of things *hoped* for. Christian faith is not, therefore, mere intellectual assent, but a volitional commitment to an objective and external reality.

Though what has thus far been said about faith elucidates the term somewhat, a pressing problem remains. Edwards notes that, “the Apostle’s language is a seeming contradiction. Proof is usually supposed to dispense with faith and compel us to accept the inference drawn. He intentionally describes faith as occupying in reference to spiritual realities the place of demonstration.”<sup>18</sup> Earlier in his essay, Edwards declares that “faith is this assurance concerning things hoped for because it is a proof of their existence, and of the existence of the unseen generally.”<sup>19</sup> Though Edwards does not fully develop his explanation of *how* faith accomplishes this dual task, his comments take the reader some distance. He notes that all men, without argument, have confidence in their moral instincts and intellects and that this confidence is a proof to them.<sup>20</sup> Edwards asks,

How do I know that I know? This is a philosopher’s enigma. For us it may be sufficient to say that to know and to know that we know are one and the same act. How do we justify our faith in the unseen? The answer is similar. It is the same thing to trust and to trust our trust. . . . When, like a guilty thing, faith blushes for its want of logic, its only refuge is to look in the face of the unseen Father. He who has most faith in his own spiritual instincts will have the strongest faith in God. To trust God is to trust ourselves. To doubt ourselves is to doubt God.<sup>21</sup>

He further notes that, “faith fastens directly on God because we impose implicit confidence in our own moral nature. With equal truth we may also say that we believe all else because we believe in God.”<sup>22</sup> Though undeveloped, Edwards’s comments are

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

extremely important with respect to the often neglected and, in many cases, highly controversial aspect of Christian life and ministry known as *apologetics*.

Apologetics is the branch of theology that offers a rational defence for the Christian faith.<sup>23</sup> The word “apologetics” derives its meaning from the Greek, “apologia,” a term used to describe the way in which a lawyer argues rationally for the truth of a particular claim. Etymologically speaking, apologetics may be seen as an attempt to “speak away” (apo = away, from; logia = speech, word) the charge brought against an individual.<sup>24</sup> The *Christian apologist* is one who seeks to “speak away” the claim that Christianity is not true, and that there is no rational justification for placing one’s faith in the declarations of Scripture. That Christians are to be prepared to offer such a rational defence for their faith ought to be uncontroversial. The Bible contains several verse passages to this effect.<sup>25</sup> The great apostle Peter penned what is perhaps the clearest of these:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ (1Peter 3:15-16).

Peter’s words are unequivocal. The Christian is to be prepared to give an answer (apologia) to anyone that asks him to provide a *reason* for believing that Christianity is true. Though the command for Christians to become able apologists is largely

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H. Wayne House and Joseph M. Holden, *Charts of Apologetics and Christian Evidences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), chart 1.

<sup>24</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Titus 1:9; Jude 1:3.

uncontroversial among defenders of the Christian faith, much discussion and debate has arisen over apologetic methodology. As Bernard Ramm points out, “The serious question of apologetics is the question of strategy.”<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps the best way to approach the subject of apologetic method is to consider the 1 Peter passage more closely. Here the apostle commands his readers to begin the apologetic task by sanctifying the Lord in their hearts. To sanctify means to “set apart” or to “hallow.” The term carries with it the idea of separating that which is cleansed, holy, and pure from that which is common or profane.<sup>27</sup> The apologetic task is to be carried out by one who has set apart God *as Lord* in his heart. This command is an echo of Paul’s earlier imperative concerning the Christian’s battle with the world:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

According to the Bible then, Christians are to set apart Christ as Lord in *all* areas of thought and conduct. This includes the task of formulating rational arguments for their faith. The apologist is therefore obliged to begin his task with complete trust in the word of God and a steadfast commitment to obey its precepts. The Bible states categorically that its declarations are wholly true (Psalm 119:160) and that its pronouncements ought to be regarded as certain:

That thy trust may be in the LORD, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee (Proverbs 22:19-21)?

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<sup>26</sup>Bernard Ramm, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1961), p. 13.

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Farstad et al., p. 711.

The above passage speaks of both knowledge and certainty—key concepts in philosophy in general and in apologetics in particular. In order to give a defence for the Christian faith that can be considered rational, one must of necessity order his arguments in accordance with a prescriptive standard of reason. Since philosophy is, to large measure, an attempt to study and apply right reason, the close relationship between philosophy and apologetics is obvious. Greg Bahnsen noted that the apologist, “defends what the theologian has learned, with the tools and insights refined by the philosopher, for the evangelistic purpose of seeing the unbeliever’s heart and mind changed.”<sup>28</sup> Apologists rightly utilize the tools provided by philosophy in order to advance sound and cogent argumentation. One problem, however, looms large for the apologist.

According to popular philosophical thought, “certainty cannot be attained.”<sup>29</sup> Though this notion is held by many respected apologetics and philosophers, the Scriptures say otherwise. For instance, the apostle Peter commanded the religious leaders of his time to “*know assuredly*,” that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The phrase, *know assuredly*, is a translation of the Greek, *asphalos oun ginosteko*. The definition of *asphalos* is “sure, certain, definite,”<sup>30</sup> and “beyond a doubt.”<sup>31</sup> Vines states

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<sup>28</sup>Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), p. 44.

<sup>29</sup>Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1980), pp. 130-131.

<sup>30</sup>*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Second Edition, Revised and Augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Fredrick W. Danker from Walter Bauer’s Fifth Edition (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 119.

<sup>31</sup>

*Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible, New International Version*, Spiros Zodhiates, Exec. Ed., (Chattanooga, TN: AMG International, Inc., 1996), p. 2059.

that the term speaks of, “the knowledge there enjoined involve[ing] freedom from fear of contradiction.”<sup>32</sup> According to Albert Barnes, the Greek phrase means “to know without any hesitation or possibility of mistake.”<sup>33</sup> The apostle John explained to his readers that he had written to them so that they might *know* that they have eternal life (1John 5:13). Stott explains that the Greek indicates, “both in word and tense, not that [John’s readers] may gradually grow in assurance, but that they may possess both here and now a present *certainty* of the life they have received in Christ.”<sup>34</sup> Vincent sees this verse as referring to knowledge that is “settled and absolute.”<sup>35</sup> The Christian apologist who has truly set apart Christ as Lord in his heart must not be lulled into setting his certainty aside when giving a rational defence for his faith. Besides, even according to the formal canons of logic, certainty is not considered necessarily impossible. According to C. J. Hookway, “A proposition is said to be certain when it is indubitable. A person is certain of a proposition when he or she cannot doubt it.”<sup>36</sup> It is just here that Edwards’s statements regarding the certainty of Christian faith become extremely significant. According to his

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W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of the Old New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), p. 43.

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Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House), online at [www.studylight.org/commentaries/bnb/view.cgi?bk=43&ch=2](http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bnb/view.cgi?bk=43&ch=2) (accessed August 28, 2014).

<sup>34</sup>John Stott, *The Epistles of John: An introduction and Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964). p. 184 (emphasis added).

<sup>35</sup>Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, available online at [www.studylight.org/commentaries/vnt/view.cgi?bk=61&ch=5](http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/vnt/view.cgi?bk=61&ch=5) (accessed August 28, 2014).

<sup>36</sup>C. J. Hookway, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, New Edition*, Ed. Ted Honderich, s.v. “Certainty” (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2005).

interpretation of Hebrews 11:1, *faith itself* is the assurance that Christianity's claims are true. Faith does not stand alone, but is contingent upon certain preconditions. To the extent that a person denounces Christian faith (or faith in general), he is committed to the actual existence of faith. Since faith commitments exist, the crucial task is to determine *which worldview has the necessary metaphysical and explanatory resources account for faith commitments in the first place*. If it can be shown that Christian theism alone can account for faith, then it follows logically and inescapably that Christian theism is true.

Faith requires, first of all, the existence of at least one being capable of object-directed thoughts. That is to say, one must be able to think *about* something. Since physical objects are not capable of entering into intentional states of consciousness (no physical object can be “about” something else the way a person's thoughts can), it is obvious that mere physical objects cannot be persuaded and are therefore incapable of exercising faith. Alex Rosenberg, one of atheism's most ardent defenders, admitted that naturalism is presently unable to account for intentional states of consciousness.<sup>37</sup> On Christian theism, however, a human being is *not* a mere physical object. Man is a non-material, thinking mind, capable of reason and reflection, which is causally active upon a physical body. The acknowledged ability of man to think *about* something comports with Christian theism, but not with materialistic atheism.

Secondly, to have faith in X entails that something *about* X is believed to be true. This means that faith is inseparable from *predication*. In order to predicate, the world must consist of both unity and plurality; there must be particular things that can be described in terms of certain universals. This is commonly referred to as “the one and the

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<sup>37</sup>Alex Rosenberg vs. William Lane Craig debate, mp3 available at [www.apologetics315.com/2013/02/william-lane-craig-vs-alex-rosenberg-debate-mp3-audio.html](http://www.apologetics315.com/2013/02/william-lane-craig-vs-alex-rosenberg-debate-mp3-audio.html).

many problem.” Since monistic accounts of the world recognize unity as actual but plurality as illusory, monism does not have the metaphysical resources to account for predication. Atomistic theories, on the other hand, see ultimate reality as a complex of innumerable particulars. If this were true, *sameness*, which is essential to predication, would not actually exist. Sameness would be a mere human construct, meaning that every example of it could be rationally denied. Only Christian theism can account for the unity and plurality that predication requires (though there is some intramural debate among theologians as to *how exactly* it does so). According to Greg Bahnsen and those in the Van Tillian tradition, God’s own triune nature is foundational to, and therefore accounts for, the existence and intelligibility of the unity and diversity found in the world.<sup>38</sup> Geisler and Feinberg on the other hand, see the similarity and distinction between the eternal God and the finite world as the basis for unity and diversity.<sup>39</sup> Whatever the case, it is clear that Christian theism alone has the metaphysical resources to account for predication.

Thirdly, because beliefs are inseparable from faith, any adequate account of faith must account for the *propositional content* of beliefs. Because *information* (synonymous with content) is non-material in nature, no physical process can account for its generation.<sup>40</sup> Alvin Plantinga has argued against materialistic views of man by showing that the propositional content of a belief transcends all material mediums it may be expressed on.<sup>41</sup> It is clear that atheistic accounts of man and his beliefs are inadequate.

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<sup>38</sup>Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, pp. 238-240, 326-328.

<sup>39</sup>Geisler and Feinberg, pp. 176-177.

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Werner Gitt, *In the Beginning Was Information* (Forest Green, AR: Master Books, 2001).

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Alvin Plantinga, *Against Materialism*, audio lecture, mp3 available at [apologetics315.com/2009/04/against-materialism-by-alvin-plantinga.html](http://apologetics315.com/2009/04/against-materialism-by-alvin-plantinga.html) (accessed

Christian theism, however, can account for the content of belief. God has enlightened man's mind with certain innate knowledge according to which he can make sense out of his experience.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, he has created man's rational and cognitive faculties for the express purpose of arriving at true conclusions (Psalm 94:8-11).

Fourthly, because faith entails persuasion and deliberation, some rational standard according to which the adjudication between conflicting ideas can take place, must exist. Once again, non-Christian metaphysical commitments seem hopelessly inadequate to account for such a standard. On Christian theism, however, rational deliberation is regulated by the laws of logic, which are themselves based upon God's own rational nature. Cornelius Van Til states that, "the law of contradiction . . . as we know it, is but the expression on a created level of the internal coherence of God's nature. . . . The logical constraints of God's thinking are the constraints of his own nature, which man is to emulate."<sup>43</sup>

Lastly, Van Til's statement regarding how man *ought* to think brings into focus the *prescriptive* nature of rational thought. This aspect of rationality is recognized not only by the theist, but by atheist thinkers as well. Clifford's words from 1877 have become something of a mantra for contemporary atheists: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."<sup>44</sup> The

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August 30, 2014).

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Ronald Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing 1982).

<sup>43</sup>

Cornelius Van Til, as quoted in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>44</sup>

"The Ethics of Belief", As quoted in *the Manitoba Humanist*, November 2010, Volume 6, Issue 11, mb.humanists.ca.

Christian can well agree with Clifford's statement, but this is because he understands that God has designed the universe in such a way that evidence does indeed point to fact. Furthermore, on Christian theism, God not only provides the preconditions for right reasoning, but has laid upon man the moral duty to do so. The atheist wishing to affirm Clifford's statement, however, faces the insolvable problem of *accounting* for objective morality within his naturalistic worldview. After exploring the issue in some detail, William Lane Craig concludes that, "In short, on an atheistic, naturalistic worldview, there just seems to be no basis for affirming the existence of objective moral values and duties."<sup>45</sup> Craig further explains the necessity of God in accounting for objective morality:

God, by definition, is the greatest conceivable being, and a being which is the paradigm of goodness is greater than one which merely exemplifies goodness. Unless we are nihilists, we have to recognize some ultimate standard of value, and God is the least arbitrary stopping point. The moral argument thus brings us to a personal, necessarily existent being who is the locus and source of moral goodness."<sup>46</sup>

God is not only the basis for right reason, but also for the moral imperative to think rationally as well. Since Christian theism alone provides an adequate account of faith itself, God's existence cannot be rationally doubted. If Hookway's view of certainty is accepted, then one has both biblical and philosophical grounds for maintaining the certainty of Christian theism. In response to what has been said, some argue that, even if it is true that Christian theism alone accounts for the prescriptive standards of rationality and morality (and hence, the preconditions of faith), it does not follow that Christian theism is *necessarily* true. It is always possible (so the argument goes) that there are as

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<sup>45</sup>William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics, Third Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), p. 179.

<sup>46</sup>

Ibid., pp. 182-183.

yet undiscovered ways of accounting for these things apart from God. As long as this possibility exists, Christian theism is at best probable. In addition, some claim that the only mind that can have certain knowledge is an omniscient mind. Since God alone is omniscient, it follows that his finite creatures do not and indeed cannot possess certain knowledge.<sup>47</sup>

In the first place, probabilities (which require possibilities) are generated by inductive reasoning. Such reasoning involves the drawing of general conclusions (with varying degrees of probability) from specific, observed instances. Though few would doubt the validity of induction, *accounting* for its validity and success-generating quality has proven impossible within non-Christian conceptual schemes. Only God can, and does, ensure the general uniformity of natural process (Genesis 8:22). Unless he and the truthfulness of his word are presupposed, the inescapable conclusion is that literally anything may have happened in the past, may be happening now, or may happen in the future—all with equal probability. Obviously in such a world genuine knowledge would be impossible. The fact that people *do* claim to know things, albeit with varying degrees of probability, is proof positive that “in their heart of hearts” they know that the universe is not random, accidental, or meaningless. The knowledge they claim to have is due to the fact that they *do* know God. Furthermore, they have placed their faith in him as the mind responsible for intelligibility of the world. However, most people refuse to exercise *saving* faith in God. Because of fallen man’s sinful desire for intellectual and moral

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R. C Sproul, in debate with Greg Bahnsen, *Classical vs. Presuppositional Apologetics* (1977), Covenant Media Foundation, mp3 available [www.cmfnow.com/thebahnsensprouldebateoverapologeticmethod.aspx](http://www.cmfnow.com/thebahnsensprouldebateoverapologeticmethod.aspx) (accessed August 28, 2014).

autonomy, most refuse to accept Christ as their personal Saviour and *Lord*. As a result, such people work hard to deny and suppress their knowledge of God. Paul explained:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Romans 1:18-20).

The attempt to suppress the knowledge of God is futile, however, for every item of knowledge gained is a constant reminder that God created both the mind capable of learning and the world capable of being understood. In short, possibilities are generated by inductive reasoning, which is provided for by God alone. It makes no sense therefore to suggest that God's existence is only probable when God alone can account for man's ability to generate probabilities in the first place. The claim that finite creatures are incapable of certainty, if presented as a certainty, is obviously self-refuting. Unless some rational justification can be given for limiting human knowledge to probabilities, the claim that finite creatures are incapable of certain knowledge is arbitrary and therefore lacking in argumentative force. At the very least, certainty among finite creatures must be regarded as possible. If so, then the necessary and sufficient conditions for certainty may justifiably be sought. The widely-accepted canons of logic, as noted earlier, do recognize certainty as attainable if certainty is defined as that which is indubitable. Though such a view of certainty is congruent with a Christian profession, it is nonetheless insufficient. The Christian understands that God's omniscience and omnipotence allow him to do whatever he wills. From a consistently Christian perspective then, the necessary and sufficient conditions for certain knowledge are not dependent on logical systems devised by man, but on the will of God in Christ in whom

are hid “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). Man can and does possess certain knowledge because God has willed it (and declared it) to be so.

In conclusion, the preconditions for the exercise of faith (in the biblical sense of the word) are explicable within a Christian worldview alone. Christian theism alone accounts for intentional states of consciousness, predication, content (information), and objective and prescriptive standards of rationality and morality. Those that deny the Christian faith must nonetheless utilize such things even to engage in the denial process. The whole enterprise of denying the faith, therefore, is a stunning exemplification (and therefore vindication) of Romans 1:18-21. Bringing this to the unbeliever’s attention serves to pull the mask off of his hypocrisy and expose his self-deceit. By appealing to faith itself and the preconditions for it, the Christian can neutralize attacks against Christianity, while vindicating his Christian worldview. In doing so he has given a rational defence for his faith while silencing its detractors, thus fulfilling the apologetic task in an effective and God-honouring manner.

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