

**Responses to Some Critics Regarding My Article
"Some Critical Comments on Presuppositionalism"**

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

The document "Some Critical Comments of Presuppositionalism" was excerpted from my doctoral dissertation titled "A Defense of Thomas Aquinas' Second Way" written for the Department of Philosophy at the University of Arkansas in 2004 where I received the Ph.D. in philosophy. It was posted my own web site (www.richardghowe.com). Part of that article was picked up by *The PuritanBoard* (<http://puritanboard.com>) where it headed a thread. These critics are contributors to that blog. Despite the rather uncharitable manner with which they deal with both me and my argument, I try to respond to their comments in a straight-forward manner. All the text (except for those under "My Response") were cut and pasted from the web site and thus may contain some misspellings, grammatical mistakes, etc. On some occasions, the punctuation of my original words departs from that of my original post. I have not attempted to remedy any this.

Mr. Bombadil's Comments:

the 1960's are calling and they want their arguments back.

My Comments:

Hopefully the reader can see how Mr. Bombadil has begun his criticism with an informal fallacy. It is know as the fallacy of *argumentum ad annis* or what C. S. Lewis called chronological snobbery. Whether or not my arguments hail from the 1960s (*note bene*) is completely irrelevant to the soundness of the arguments themselves. But the value for the one using the fallacy is that it plants in the readers' minds that there is something undesirable about the arguments in hopes of generating an emotional response that can serve as a surrogate for actual refutation.

My Original:

In response several things might be said. First, much of the argument that Van Til and Bahnsen make seems more fitting as a transcendental argument for the necessity and unavoidability of logic rather than a transcendental argument for the necessity and unavoidability of Trinitarian theism.

Mr. Bombadil's Comments:

Hmmm, VT/B actually argue about morality, language, history, causation, experience, universals, redemptiuon, salvation, et al! However, this man says that MUCH of VT/B's argument is for logic? Too bad logic is but one aspect, among MANY, that they use to argue. Furthermore, notice how the author doesn't bring up VT/B's claim regarding the one/many and its resolution by

trinitarian philosophy. This is horrible and not worthy of a read. At least quote your opponants strongest case! How sad, and pathetic.

My Response:

In a later comment (below), Mr. Bombadil admits that he does not understand a particular sentence in my article. I submit to you that there is quite a bit more of my article that he does not understand than just that one sentence. He begins his critique of my position with a misunderstanding. I will try to help Mr. Bombadil and other Presuppositionalists who often have trouble understanding critiques of their own system.

First, Mr. Bombadil mistakenly takes my comment "much of the argument" to mean much of the argument that Van Til and Bahnsen make throughout their writings. But what I was referring to was much of the argument **that I had just summarized**. I am not trying to refute all of Van Til's and Bahnsen's material but only that part which pertains to the particular argument that was the subject of my critique. Thus, in my specific comments, I was making the point that their transcendental argument that they say proves the existence of the Trinitarian God of Christian theism really does nothing more than prove the transcendental necessity of logic. Now if Van Til and Bahnsen think that such a demonstration is *de facto* a demonstration of the existence of the Trinitarian God of Christian theism, this argument itself needs to be made. But of course, they have not made that argument.

Second, Mr. Bombadil laments the fact that I did not bring Van Til and Bahnsen's point about the one and the many. But their comments on the one and the many are completely irrelevant to my critique.

Third, Mr. Bombadil admonishes me to "at least quote your opponants [sic] strongest case!" This is a certainly an obligation on anyone's part when seeking to refute an opponent's position. But Mr. Bombadil only thinks I have failed to do so because he has completely misunderstood what I wrote in the first place. Nowhere did I suggest that Van Til's argument from the one and the many was a bad argument.

Fourth, as I go on to say in my original article (which part was not included in the version of my article posted on *The Puritan Board* website to which Mr. Bombadil is responding), Presuppositionalists cannot understand the difference between a presuppositional (or transcendental) type of argument and a *demonstratio quia* type of argument.¹ Space will not allow me to repeat that

¹ I am indebted to William Lane Craig for pointing this distinction out in his "A Classical Apologist's Response," in Steven B. Cowan, ed. *Five Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 233

point here. Let it suffice to say that because Mr. Bombadil (and other Presuppositionalists) do not get what that difference is, they waste a lot of effort defending notions that are ultimately just variations on the Classical approach to apologetics. They end up defending notions that the Classical apologist would accept; all the while thinking that they have established Presuppositionalism. The irony would be funny if it was not so frustrating to continually have to try to remedy their confusion.

Fifth, Mr. Bombadil is quite uncharitable here in characterizing my comments as "horrible and not worth of a read." I find it interesting that that which is not worth of a read, he takes to the time to read and respond to. He compounds his embarrassment by characterizing my comments as sad and pathetic. What is sad and pathetic, however, is when someone over-reacts to an argument while misunderstanding the argument in the first place.

My Original:

But somehow, Van Til thinks that this is the case with a full-blown Trinitarian Christian theism. While it is clear to me how logic is transcendently necessary for there to be an argument against God, it is not clear to me how God is transcendently necessary for an argument against God. In fact, though Van Til throughout his writings repeatedly asserts that one must presuppose the God of Christian theism before he can know anything else, I have yet to encounter one instance where Van Til actually makes this argument.

Mr. Bombadil's Comments:

Hmmm, this paper seems to leave out the pages in VT: R&A by Bahnsen and also the pages in Frames ATGG, DKJ, and CVT:AOHT. Too bad. Can any one answer me why people who critique Van Til don't even bother to do it properly? All this does is embarrass the critic and possibly lead unsuspecting people away from Van Til through the use of deception. No good.

My Response:

The implication here seems to be that because I left out certain pages, I have somehow missed the salient aspects of Van Til's and Bahnsen's arguments. Let us suppose for the sake of argument that I had done so (which I had not). This would do nothing to save Van Til's and Bahnsen's arguments that I do critique. At most it would say that Van Til and Bahnsen are inconsistent in how they argue their case. This is so because no matter what I had left out (unless it was something along the lines of Augustine's *Retractions*) it could do nothing to remedy the failings of the arguments that I do include. I defy any Presuppositionalist to produce anything in Van Til or Bahnsen that is consistent with what I have them saying in my original critique and that further delivers

their own arguments. To merely make references to others' works without giving the specifics is inadequate.

Here is another place where Mr. Bombadil is quite uncharitable in his attack. Even if it was true that I had overlooked salient aspects of the writings of other Presuppositionalists, it does not follow that I did so deliberately, which would have to be the case for me to be using deception.

My Original:

What the Presuppositionalist has confused here is the difference between the order of knowing and the order of being; or, if you will, the difference between a certain metaphysical consideration and a certain epistemological consideration.

Mr. Bombadil's Comments:

Hmmm, stated like this it would seem like VT/B are schoolboy idiots and those men who had Ph.Ds., read philosophers in their original languages, were respected in the field, simply confused this point. The problem, again, is that the author is a hack. You see, VT/B DIRECTLY brought up this issue in the concept of prioritizing the metaphysical and the epistemological.

My Response:

These types of rhetorical tactics are irksome. Mr. Bombadil is committing a straw man fallacy. I said nothing about Van Til and Bahnsen being schoolboy idiots. Nor did I say anything about my own credentials. In fact, when I originally wrote this material under consideration, I did not yet have the Ph.D., as this material is from my doctoral dissertation. This type of emotionally charged rhetoric is usually symptomatic of one who cannot or will not take on an argument directly.

Second, I regret that Mr. Bombadil has resorted to name calling. Mr. Bombadil says that I am a hack. But Mr. Bombadil does not even know me. He has no idea who I am or where I am coming from except what he might reasonably infer from what I have written. Such an attitude in writing is out of bounds within adult academic circles. I am not a hack. While I gratefully acknowledge the influences on my own thinking (which are footnoted in the article and the dissertation), my thoughts are my own for my own purposes. Even still, even if I was a hack, this does nothing to refute my arguments.

My Original:

Thus, in the order of knowing, the map is first. In the theistic argument debate, the theist certainly sees that in the order of being God is first, since, if God is the creator of all things besides Himself, then, if there was not a God, there would be nothing else at all, not even an argument for God. But in the order of knowing, it might be the case that one would need a "map" to God, i.e., a theistic argument. Just as using a map to find Fayetteville says nothing amiss about the

metaphysical priority of Fayetteville to the map, likewise, to use a theistic argument to find God says nothing amiss about the metaphysical priority of God to the argument.

Mr. Bombadil's Comments:

Don't you just love when people say things dogmatically without providing counters? I mean, even John Calvin wrote in the institutes that if man is self-conscious then he is God conscious. Calvin admitted he didn't know if one came before the other, or if they both were at the same time. Now, the main problem with this section is that he confuses first in the order of *temporality*, and first in the order of ultimate authority.

My Response:

What could Mr. Bombadil possibly mean that I have stated things dogmatically "without providing counters"? This whole article is a counter. It occurs within a 200+ page dissertation full of counters, arguments, and expositions (though only a small part is on Presuppositionalism). I am not the one who is confusing things here. I am discussing epistemological verses metaphysically priority. My discussion has nothing to do with temporality verses "ultimate authority." His comment is silly. The epistemological vs. metaphysical priority issue has nothing to do with temporality. If he thinks this other distinction is relevant, he needs to argue so. In any event, I have not confused that issue since it has nothing to do with what is under discussion.

My Original:

Van Til is wrong to think that if an argument leads on to a belief in the existence of God, this God could not be the God of Christianity.

Mr. Bombadil's Comments:

So an argument could lead to a belief in God and it could not be the God of Christianity??? Of course someone could make a valid argument for any "god," but if it was sound it would have to be the God of Christianity since He's the only God that exists. if it was "any god" then the conclusion would not be sound. Sheesh! No wonder unbelievers laugh at us and our argumentative abilities.

My Response:

What we have here is the amusing phenomenon of where the opponent invariably supports the view of the very person he is attacking. It is Van Til who is saying that if one gives an argument that proves the existence of God without presupposing the God of Christianity, then the God that has been proven is not the God of Christianity. I refer the reader to Van Til's comments in *The Defense of the Faith*, pp. 248-254. I am the one who is saying that one can give an argument which proves that God exists, even if it is the case that the argument *simpliciter* does not prove that the God whose existence is demonstrated is the God of

Christianity. Of course it is trivially true that since there is only one God, then any argument that proves the existence of God proves the existence of that one God. But Van Til is the one who will not allow this. He is the one who insists that the Trinitarian God of Christian theism must be supposed before the argument.

My Original:

Second, Van Til seems to confuse knowing something truly and knowing something exhaustively. He seems to think that unless the nonbeliever correctly links the elements of his knowledge of the world to the Creator of those elements, he has not understood any of those elements at all. This seems to me to be clearly false. Surely, even if there were a God one who disbelieves in the existence of God could still have some degree of truth. An atheist can learn agriculture (to use Van Til's example) as well, if not better in some cases, than the theist. In fact, Van Til's point seems to prove too much. Even he himself would have to admit that the theist does not exhaustively know certain elements of his world. Van Til would have to admit that no human is omniscient. Thus, if the theist lacks a certain degree of knowledge, then it would seem that the difference between the atheist and theist is merely a matter of degree. But if it is only a matter of degree, then Van Til's system breaks down and those principles in his system that would militate against the legitimacy of the theistic arguments no longer hold.

Mr. Bombadil's Comments:

Hmmmm, it'd be nice to have some quotes by van Til. But(!) VT?B does not believe this. They have said that we don't know things exhaustively, but God does. So we can be sure that our knowlede of something is fully consistant and there would be no future instances of disconfirmation since the one who knows everything told us about, say, a cat. And, yes, the atheist does know things! See Bahnsen on this in "The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception." The problem is that: IF HIS ESPOUSED WORLDVIEW WERE TRUE THEN HE WOULDN'T!

My Response:

Mr. Bombadil wants a quote. I am surprised that he asks for one. Usually one asks for a quote because one questions whether the point under consideration accurately represents the subject matter. I should think that Mr. Bombadil would not quarrel with my characterization of Van Til here, but rather, would have tried to defend it as being the only true view to have on this matter.

Nevertheless, I will accommodate Mr. Bombadil with a representative quote. "In our arguments for the existence of God we have frequently assumed that you and we together have an area of knowledge on which we agree. But we really do not grant that you see *any fact in any dimension of life truly.*" (Cornelius Van Til, *Why I Believe in God* (Chestnut, Hill; Philadelphia: Westminster Theological

Seminary, n.d.), 9, emphasis added) Mr. Bombadil is apparently missing my point again. Van Til is the one who is saying that since the unbeliever does not acknowledge the existence of God, then the unbeliever is the one who knows nothing truly. Mr. Bombadil then thinks he is correcting my misunderstanding by informing me that the atheist does know things (appealing to Bahnsen). If Bahnsen does make such a claim, then he is clearly departing from Van Til who *explicitly* denies that the atheist knows anything truly. But my argument is that Van Til is illicitly inferring that because the atheist does not acknowledge God (and thus cannot acknowledge the relationship between a given fact and God) that therefore the atheist does not know that given fact truly. This is a *non-sequitur*. Further, let Mr. Bombadil (and Bahnsen) explain how it is possible that the atheist can "know things" and yet it still be the case that the atheist does not see *any fact in any dimension of life truly*. If he wants to acknowledge that there is an inconsistency within the Presuppositionalist camp then let him do so. My mistake in this regard was being too charitable with the Presuppositionalism in thinking that in such a central matter, Van Til and Bahnsen were on the same page.

But there is a bigger problem here. Mr. Bombadil thinks he is on to something by shouting that in the case of the atheist who actually knows things (but would not know things if atheism were true): this again is a confusion of the transcendental argument with the *demonstratio quia* argument. If only the Presuppositionalists would get this subtlety, then much of what they have to say could go unsaid since it has already been said much better by the Classical apologists.

My Original:

Last, and perhaps most serious, while Bahnsen asserts that the laws of logic can be known to be valid only if one presupposes the Christian world view, he goes on to use the laws of logic in his attempt to demonstrate that this is the case.

Mr. Bombadil's Comments:

Yeah, just like the author said we must presuppose logic in order to deny it then if God is transcendentally necessary we must presuppose Him in order to prove or deny Him. All this is, is a begging of the question against Bahnsen.

My Response:

I suspect that some think that if you just repeat your position enough times without ever proving your position, some may actually begin to think that the position has been demonstrated. Over and over again (as evidenced in Bahnsen's debate with Sproul) Presuppositionalists assert what their apologetic method is supposed to do. But never have I seen any Presuppositionalist actually show how their method is supposed to do what they say it does. Neither have I seen

very many Presuppositionalists actually do apologetics. As I have said on occasion:

Classical apologists defend Christianity.

Presuppositional apologists defend Presuppositionalism.²

All they do is continue to rant about the superiority of their approach while failing to ever show why any Christian should believe that this approach is superior. Thus, their failure is two-fold. They claim that the Presuppositionalist method shows that Christianity is true by the "impossibility of the contrary" (to uses Bahnsen's phrase). But no Presuppositionalist that I have read (The first footnote in the original article (which was not reproduced in the posting on *The Puritan Board* web site) will attest the works on this subject of which I am to a greater or lesser extent familiar and have studied.) has ever shown that this is the case. They merely assert that it is so. Second, because the method cannot actually deliver on its promises, I have rarely found any Presuppositionalist who is in the market place actually defending the Christian faith. I note for the reader Bahnsen's failure in his debate with Gordon Stein. One only has to compare how hollow Bahnsen's argument sounds in comparison to any number of Classical apologists' arguments in similar situations. Let the hearer decide. When I say that Bahnsen's arguments are hollow, I mean that they abjectly fail to prove the certainty the Trinitarian God of Christian theism. All Bahnsen proved in his debate with Stein was the transcendental necessity of logic and how the materialist form of atheism (though not a more Platonic form) cannot account for the laws of logic. Yet as evident from Bahnsen's discussion with Sproul, the Presuppositionalist method is supposed to do nothing less than deliver the absolute certainty of the whole of the Christian world view. This it did not do. I defy any Presuppositionalist who is not *a priori* committed to

² Having recently discovered the article of Presuppositionalist Sean Choi ("The Transcendental Argument" in Norman L. Geisler and Chad V. Meister, eds., *Reasons for Faith: Making the Case for the Christian Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 231-247) I may have to retract this factious comment. Not yet having carefully re-read the article, the jury is still out for me as to whether Choi's argument strategy is purely presuppositional and/or whether the argument itself is sound. My prima facie reading of it at this point, however, is very encouraging. The article strikes me as very thorough and substantive and I look forward to doing a more careful analysis.

Presuppositionalism to quarrel with my contention that Bahnsen did not accomplish his goal in this debate.³

My Original:

Throughout his debate with Sproul, as well as throughout out his writings, Bahnsen utilizes a stock phrase that he gleaned from Van Til. He encapsulates the Presuppositionalist approach by saying that Christianity can be shown to be true by demonstrating the "impossibility of the contrary." But there is something very wrong with this line of reasoning vis-à-vis the Presuppositionalist/Classical debate. They are asserting that if the contrary to Christianity can be shown to be impossible, then Christianity necessarily is true. But this could only be the case if the laws of logic hold antecedently. However, Bahnsen has already argued that the laws of logic cannot be known to be valid unless Christianity is presupposed.

Mr. Bombadil's Comments:

I think Bahnsen said they could not "account" or "make sense" of them WITHIN THEIR WORLDVIEW. They "know them" because they presuppose ours.

My Response:

Here is the problem in all its glaring glory. I hope by now the reader can see the bankruptcy of the Presuppositionalist's position (or at least Mr. Bombadil's rendering of it). I am amazed that at this crucial juncture, Mr. Bombadil cannot see what staring him right in the face. Perhaps I should shout it back to him. WHAT FOLLOWS FROM THE EXCHANGE AT THIS POINT BETWEEN BAHNSEN AND SPROUL IS NOT THAT THE ATHEIST MUST PRESUPPOSE THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW. WHAT FOLLOWS IS THAT HE MUST PRESUPPOSE LOGIC! As I said in my opening remark (which Mr. Bombadil misunderstood) this whole approach (in this context) ends up proving the transcendental necessity of logic. It says nothing about the transcendental necessity of the Trinitarian God of Christian theism. Bahnsen ends up proving that logic is undeniable (which is, of course, what the Classical approach has been saying all along). He inadvertently shows that, before Bahnsen can even distinguish his position from the Classical position, logic has to antecedently be the case. What he was not able to do (and no Presuppositionalist can do) is to show that unless the Christian world view (or the Trinitarian God of Christian

³ Even the Presuppositionalist Sean Choi observes "I think it can be seen that Bahnsen's strategy (employed in his debate with Stein) is insufficient to establish the truth of [the premise 'It is necessary that: if Christian theism is false, then there is no rational justification for the laws of logic.'].\" (Choi, \"The Transcendental Argument\" p. 239) Choi also remarks that he has met plenty of people in Reformed circles \"who think that Bahnsen did not actually prove what he intended to prove.\" (Choi, \"The Transcendental Argument\" p. 232)

theism or the self-attesting authoritative Scriptures or however else they encapsulate their position) is presupposed, nothing can be rationally argued for in the first place. Let me be clear: Bahnsen is not able to even epistemologically frame the issue before us without antecedently presupposing the laws of logic. Thus, he cannot possibly presuppose (before presupposing logic) the whole of the Christian world view. Yet in his exchange with Sproul, this is exactly what he insisted needed to be done. If Bahnsen thinks (as he apparently seems to think) that by presupposing logic, he has *de facto* presupposed the whole of the Christian world view, then he is mistaken. Not only has he not done so, he cannot do so. Bahnsen says to Sproul that one cannot be certain of logic. In other words, logic itself might be illicit unless it is antecedently the case that Christian Trinitarian Theism is the case. (Mr. Bombadil is wrong in thinking that all Bahnsen was aiming at was how uncertain one would be in whether he had accurately employed the laws of logic. Bahnsen was making a stronger claim about the very validity of the law of Modus Ponens itself.) But this is incoherent. The only reason there is even a difference between Christian Trinitarian Theism and non-"Christian Trinitarian Theism" is because, even for Bahnsen, logic is *antecedently* the case.

Now, here again is where I would not be surprised if certain Presuppositionalists miss the point. Logic is only what it is because God is Who He is. Logic (as an epistemological matter) is only what it is because it reflects being. The metaphysics is what makes knowledge possible. Further, the metaphysics is what it is because God is ultimate reality. But none of this is Presuppositionalism. It is Classical apologetics. Where the rub is (to help Mr. Bombadil know exactly where to enter the real debate) is whether and how one shows that this is the case. Every time (and I mean EVERY TIME) that I have read a Presuppositionalist try to make this argument, he does Classical apologetics. That is the irony of this whole exchange. The more the Presuppositionalist actually tries to make an argument, the more he ends up doing the very thing the Classical apologist has been doing all along. If they do not see this, then, I am not sure what else can be said to open their eyes.

My Original:

Thus, he cannot demonstrate this very point by any argument of the "impossibility of the contrary" since there would only be a difference between Christianity and its contrary if the laws of logic were valid.

Mr. Bombadil's Comments:

I read this sentence 10 times and do not understand him or how it ties into what he was trying to say above.

My Response:

Let me re-word the sentence by moving the word 'only' to see if this helps and expand it slightly with brackets.

Thus, he cannot demonstrate this very point by any argument of the "impossibility of the contrary" since there would be a difference between Christianity and its contrary *only* if the laws of logic were [antecedently] valid.

With all due respect, I must say that I am not surprised at that Mr. Bombadil does not understand this. This is one of the first accurate things he has said in his comments. But the problem is bigger than he realizes. He understands less than he admits. This is probably why he is a Presuppositionalist—for if he was able to understand these matters, he would be a Classical apologist.

My Original:

[Sproul] says that certainty only applies to deductive certainty "∴. I'd like to say it doesn't even apply to that. "∴ There are two reasons why "∴. First of all, if this [syllogism] is certain, it must be an application of the law of Modus Ponens. That's a basic law of logic. "∴ Even in low level cases "∴ the question arises even for logicians 'Are you applying your formal laws?' You can be mistaken in identifying a case of Modus Ponens. "∴ Secondly, there's this question. 'Why is the law of Modus Ponens to be accepted?' How do you know that Modus Ponens is a valid form of argumentation? Even Modus Ponens can't be argued for without Modus Ponens. So, according to Bahnsen, one can never be sure whether one has adequately or correctly employed Modus Ponens in one's own argument and further, one could never be sure that the law of Modus Ponens was valid. So where does any certainty come from? For Bahnsen, even our confidence in the laws of logic themselves is only possible if one presupposes the Christian world view. Thus, the Presuppositionalist tries to show the nonbeliever that the rationality that supposedly gives rise to his unbelief is only possible because the Christian God exists. In this way, the Presuppositionalist tries to get the nonbeliever to see that his unbelief is impossible to rationally maintain.

Mr. Bombadil's Comments:

Actually, according to Bahnsen "You can be mistaken in identifying a case of Modus Ponens." He said you CAN be mistaken, not that one can NEVER BE SURE. The claim by Bahnsen is not a universal claim but the author interprets it as such. More bad scholarship. Also, Bahnsen is arguing against a NEUTRAL application of modus ponens. Bahnsen also points out that one must use modus ponens to argue for modus ponens, same with God.

My Response:

I am not engaging in bad scholarship. Mr. Bombadil is factually wrong here as to what Bahnsen is saying. I am re-listening to the audio of the debate as I write this response. It is manifest that Bahnsen is saying something much more substantive than Mr. Bombadil has him saying. I wonder if Mr. Bombadil has heard the debate or perhaps it has been so long since he has heard it that he has forgotten the essence of what Bahnsen's position was against Sproul vis-à-vis logic and God. The truth is that Bahnsen makes two points against Sproul's position that rational certainty obtains only in the case of logic. The first response from Bahnsen is that logic cannot give us certainty because we can never be sure if we have properly used a given law of logic (in the case of the illustration, Modus Ponens). This Mr. Bombadil has correctly observed. But Bahnsen gives a second reason why logic cannot give rational certainty. He asks "Why is the law of Modus Ponens to be accepted?" He says that the law of Modus Ponens cannot be certain because it cannot be argued for without using the law of Modus Ponens. Bahnsen's argument against Sproul is hopelessly self-refuting. He uses the law of Modus Ponens to argue why the law of Modus Ponens is not rationally certain. But to the degree that that the law of Modus Ponens fails to yield rational certainty, to that degree Bahnsen's point itself about the law of Modus Ponens is not rationally certain. Bahnsen thinks he can deliver rational certainty by an appeal to "Sola Scriptura." What is self-refuting about this appeal is that, unless the laws of logic are *antecedently* the case, then there would be no difference between "Sola Scriptura" and non-"Sola Scriptura" for this difference is an expression of the law of non-contradiction. Bahnsen cannot rationally maintain that it is "Sola Scriptura" that gives us rational certainty (by establishing the laws of logic themselves) since the laws of logic themselves would already have to be in place for Bahnsen to be able to know that it was "Sola Scriptura" that he was presenting and not something else. Why this is not obvious to the Presuppositionalist I cannot explain.

Further, Bahnsen cannot prove his points either about Modus Ponens or the Scriptures themselves by such an appeal to Scripture. What Bahnsen fails to see (again something staring the Presuppositionalist right in the face) is that the law of Modus Ponens is transcendently necessary. It is in fact undeniable. But this transcendental necessity and undeniability does not obtain with the Scriptures themselves. You have to use the laws of logic in order to try to deny the laws of logic. But you do not have to use the Scriptures in order to deny the Scriptures. Thus, as they fit into an overall argument strategy, logic functions differently than Scripture. It is amazing to me that someone with the mental acumen as a Greg Bahnsen cannot see this. Indeed, it is a truth that seems lost on most of the Presuppositionalists with whom I am familiar. When someone

cannot see what is in fact self-evident, then I am afraid that there is not much that further argument can accomplish.

What should be manifest at this point is that logic is transcendently necessary. This is the point that I have tried to make all along. Bahnsen's argumentation shows that logic is transcendently necessary. What his argumentation does not to (which is admitted by some Presuppositionalists) is that it does not show that the Christian Scriptures (or the Trinitarian God of Christian theism or any other synecdoche for Christianity) is transcendently necessary in an epistemological sense. But of course it would have to do this in order for Presuppositionalism to be the superior system that its advocates boast. Instead, it is embarrassingly bankrupt. It is sad that the enthusiasm and confidence of Presuppositionalism's proponents are inversely proportional to Presuppositionalism's solvency.

My Original:

In a debate with the classical Christian apologist R. C. Sproul, Presuppositionalist Greg Bahnsen, arguably Van Til's most ardent defender, claimed that even the laws of logic do not yield the certainty that Sproul thinks.[8] Sproul maintained that the only place where one can have absolute philosophical certainty is in the formal realm with the laws of logic.[9] In making this point, Sproul was more or less conceding to Bahnsen that the classical model does not yield absolute certainty in its conclusions about the existence of God **since the classical a posteriori arguments to that end have an element of induction in them.**

Mr. Bombadil's Comments:

And induction only makes sense within the Christian worldview, so it turns out that the Thomist is really presupposing the Christian worldview after all, he just doesn't admit it. Quit deceptive.

My Response:

Here again is the Presuppositionalist's argumentative sleight of hand (though I should like to think that it stems more from a lack of critical thinking and an over-enthusiastic commitment to a system rather than anything deliberately deceptive on the part of Mr. Bombadil). The Presuppositionalist is confused as to what's going on here. If the argument is that the Christian worldview is transcendently necessary, then I hope that it is clear to the reader by now that his is plainly false.⁴ But if the argument is that inductive argumentation cannot

⁴ Remember, the Presuppositionalist is not merely saying that the Christian worldview is *metaphysically* necessary. This point came up explicitly in the Bahnsen/Sproul debate. Of course there if God did not exist, then nothing would exist. Both sides agree on this. Bahnsen was making a different *A Response to Some Critics Regarding My Article "Some Critical Comments on Presuppositionalism"*

be accounted for without God, then this is a *demonstratio quia* argument, not a transcendental argument. It is the classical approach that argues that phenomenon such as logic cannot be accounted for by the world view of atheism. So, Mr. Bombadil, in one sense, is right that induction "only makes sense within the Christian worldview." What Mr. Bombadil cannot see or understanding that the argument that shows this to be the case is exactly the classical approach to apologetics, not Presuppositionalism.

Scott's Comments:⁵

I notice in the CV that his first reference is Norm Geisler.

My Response:

It is not clear from this short observation what Scott's point is. The significance of Norm Geisler appearing in my CV is not revealed by that CV. Tom Senor is also referenced in my CV but one cannot infer anything about my views on philosophy of mind or Alvin Plantinga because of this. Indeed, Richard Lee, who is an atheist, is also referenced. What might this mean? Let me, therefore, fill in the blanks. While Norm Geisler is listed because he is a Christian scholar who knows me personally and professionally (and therefore is able to provide a reference) it is also the case that I agree with Geisler about the superiority of Thomism (which is the philosophical approach for which Geisler is famous). I am unabashedly a Thomist regarding my metaphysics and epistemology (thought not entirely regarding my theology). Perhaps Scott is pointing out an "explanation" of why I take the position that I do in these matters.

C. Matthew McMahon's Comments:

Quote: [from Mr. Bombadil] Too bad. Can any one answer me why people who critique Van Til don't even bother to do it properly?

Its because they don't take the time to read ALL his writings. That's why I've decided to write something substantial later after *finishing everything*. Its coming Paul. Give me some time...I know you can't wait.

My Response:

Mr. McMahon appears to think that I have a misunderstanding of Van Til and that my misunderstanding stems from my having failed to read all his writings. I suspect that there are writings of Van Til that I have failed to read. Is the suggestion here that I have misunderstood Van Til because of failing to factor in

claim. His claim was that the Christian worldview (at another time he says the Scriptures) is *epistemologically* necessary.

⁵ Here we have for the first time a second critic enter the conversation.

material from him from his other writings? I defy anyone to produce material from Van Til (or Bahnsen) that contradicts my summation of their position that I have in my original article. Further, I defy any Presuppositionalist to produce material from Van Til or Bahnsen that will deliver their position from my criticisms. My contention is that if there is any material from Van Til or Bahnsen that refutes my critique, then that material will be inconsistent with that aspect of their position that I have summarized in my article. There are only a few options here. Either I have misconstrued the Presuppositionalist's position (which I deny), or Van Til says things elsewhere that differs from my summation (which means that he is inconsistent), or Bahnsen has misrepresented Van Til (which I do not believe is the case), or Bahnsen says things elsewhere that differs from my summation (which means that he is inconsistent). I will not (at this point) quarrel with anyone who insists that Van Til and/or Bahnsen are inconsistent. My argument here is that: (1) my summation is true to their views (or part of their views) and (2) my critique is sound.

Conclusion

For all its erudition, Presuppositionalism is an empty promise. To the degree that it actually achieves substance, to that degree it has transformed itself into Classical apologetics. I would that Presuppositionalists would spend as much time on actually defending the Christian faith as they do on defending Presuppositionalism itself. My harsh comments are not intended to be an attack on those Christians who opt for this system. Nor are they intended to be an attack on the Reformed theological heritage. There are a number of Christian thinkers who are just as Reformed as Van Til or Bahnsen who nevertheless reject the Presuppositionalist system of apologetics. The line dividing Presuppositional and Classical apologetics does not track the line dividing Reformed and non-reformed theology. It does, however, begin to track good and bad philosophy or philosophical methodology in certain places. No one fails to do philosophy. Some just do it more poorly than others. In certain crucial places, Presuppositionalism is poor thinking. As poor thinking, it invariably falls short of God and His created reality.